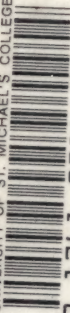


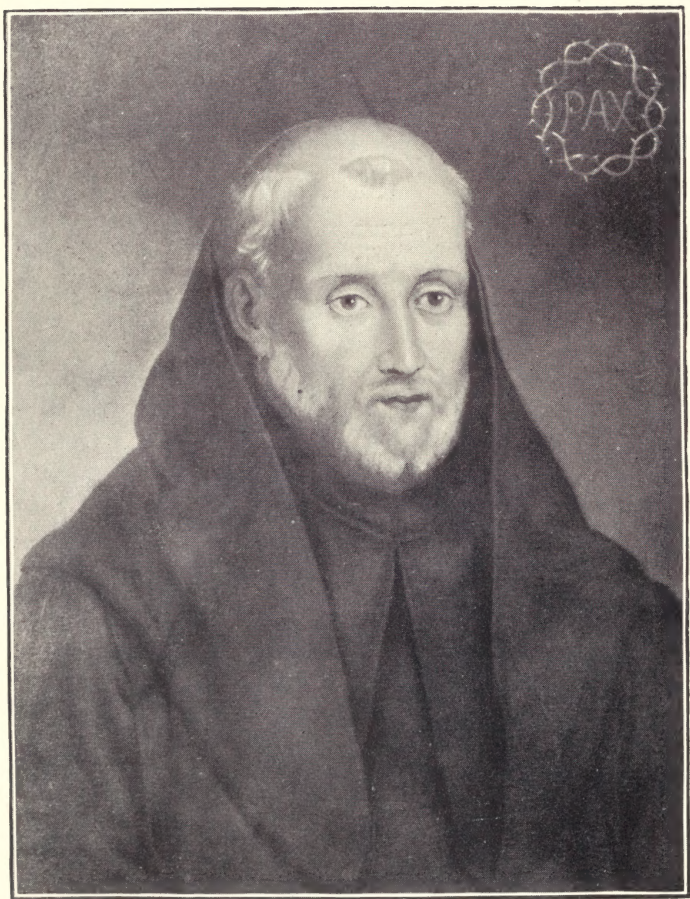
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VEN. FATHER AUGUSTINE BAKER.

From a painting by Herr Zoldaticz at Stanbrook Abbey.

THE INNER LIFE OF DAME GERTRUDE MORE



REVISED AND EDITED BY
DOM BENEDICT WELD-BLUNDELL
MONK OF THE ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT



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TO
OUR LADY OF CONSOLATION,
THE PATRONESS OF THE FOUNDATION OF CAMBRAY,
NOW AT STANBROOK

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED BY HER UNWORTHY SERVANT,

THE EDITOR,
CHAPLAIN OF THE SAID ABBEY

PREFACE

NEARLY half a century has rolled by since Abbot Sweeney wrote of Father Baker's "Life of Dame Gertrude More" thus: "This [work] was in two volumes; the second is unfortunately lost. In this Life the Father describes the whole method of his guidance of his spiritual daughter. It is full of the most practical instruction, and we cannot too deeply regret that any portion of such a work should be lost to us. The first volume was accidentally picked up in Germany a few years ago; perhaps the second may yet be recovered."

The pious hope of the Abbot has been fulfilled. Some years ago the "Life of an Unknown Nun," as it was described in the catalogue, was picked up by a monk of Ampleforth Abbey for a trifling sum, and upon examination the volume was found to contain in manuscript the substance of Father Baker's "Life of Dame Gertrude More," with a few passages here and there omitted by the copyist for the sake of brevity. This precious work of Father Baker, by the courtesy of the Abbot of Ampleforth,¹ I am now able to submit to the public for the first time.

¹ This applies to the second part of the Life only. The first part is taken from a manuscript which has long been in the possession of Stanbrook.

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In former days, till the devastating Reformation swept over this land, nearly every county was dotted over with nunneries. Not a county but could boast of some religious house, the greater number by far belonging to the Cistercian or Benedictine Order. Few indeed were the counties which were not graced by the presence of one or more of the latter, sometimes, as on the eastern border of England, the number rising to a dozen or more.

From authentic records it is easy to obtain a fairly complete picture of the manner of life pursued in Benedictine convents, and their influence on the world around them.¹ Let it suffice here to say that, while, on the one hand, they pursued the contemplative life, on the other, they were not unmindful of the needs of the world about them. And such a good level of observance was maintained that the Royal Commissioners who had been appointed for the purpose of finding pretexts for the dissolution of the nunneries were fain to admit that there was but little cause for complaint.

Long, however, before the subject of this biography saw the light, the storm of the Reformation had passed over the English nunneries, and there was nothing left to show what once had been save blackened walls and desecrated churches. Indeed, so entirely was the memory of the life obliterated, that Father Baker was able to observe that "at this time" (when

¹ The reader must be referred to Abbot Gasquet's "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries" for fuller details. In the sixth chapter of the second volume will be found a very complete picture of the manner of life and observance of Benedictine communities in England up to the time of their dissolution.

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Helen More was a maid of twenty) "the religious state for women was little understood in England."

There were not wanting, however, devout men who earnestly desired to see restored the past glories of Benedictine nunneries. Prominent among these was Father Benet Jones, an active and distinguished member of the then recently revived English Benedictine Congregation. Father Benet had under his direction a number of young maidens, many of good family, in whom he fostered an incipient inclination towards the religious state. Of these he gathered together the more promising, and, like another Ursula, led them forth from their fathers' houses and country to seek God and the religious state in a strange land. Among these young ladies was Helen, afterwards Gertrude, More. The difficulties the little company had to contend with in securing a habitation are sufficiently indicated by Father Baker. A house in a ruinous condition was lent to them at Cambray. Nothing was standing save the four bare walls, and these were so cracked that the workmen engaged to repair them thought that they could not hold together beyond another thirty years. However, at considerable outlay, the house was made habitable, and the little company took possession on Christmas Eve, 1623, and on the following Sunday the nine postulants received the habit from the Archbishop of Cambray, assisted by the President, and the house was formally and canonically established.¹

¹ An interesting paper is to be found in the town archives of Cambray, descriptive of the convent buildings and what the town

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The new Benedictine house at Cambray was not, however, an exact reproduction or revival of the ancient English monasteries. There was no aged surviving nun to recall or hand down to the rising generation the memory of departed glories and traditions. The foundation was in many respects a new departure and established on new lines. Intercourse with the outer world was to be much more restricted than heretofore ; egress beyond the enclosure walls was to be strictly prohibited ; grilles were to be erected, and the stranger without was on no account to be admitted.

A number of circumstances, no doubt, contributed to bring about this change from the older order of things. There was first of all the inherent difficulty of adding external good works to the pursuit of contemplation. In many cases it is found in practice that souls are prone to substitute good works for contemplation rather than add them to contemplation. Thus external good works become a positive hindrance to the pursuit

thought of the community. The document is worth recording, and may be thus freely rendered : " The situation of the house of these English dames is healthy and sufficiently commodious, but not spacious. The buildings are very simple and closely packed, composed of brick. Their church is extremely small, but particularly neat and seemly, and therein the Divine Office is solemnized in an edifying manner. The nuns themselves are very observant of their Rule." Further on in the document the presence of the English dames in Cambray is declared to be of real advantage to the town, for not only are they of no expense to the municipality, as they subsist on their own dowers, rents, etc., but also many visitors are attracted from England to live near these nuns of their own nationality.

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of contemplation.¹ Then, there was the fear arising from the extreme licence and lawlessness of the times, which rendered the residence of communities in country districts,² and still more the presence of religious women in the streets and public places, most undesirable. Even the precincts of convents were not safe, but were not infrequently invaded by ruffians, who dragged forth unwilling novices, and forced them into the marriage state. Influenced doubtlessly by these and similar considerations, the Council of Trent used the weight of its authority to tighten up the laws which regulated the observance of enclosure. Not only was the law which forbids externs from entering the enclosure enforced under severe penalties, but the egress of the Sisters from the enclosure was strictly prohibited, except for a just cause approved by the Bishop.³ For these and other reasons which may easily be conceived, the new foundation at Cambray was established on lines

¹ St. Thomas (2-2, Q. clxxxii., art. iii.) says: "The active life may be considered as meaning the zealous exercise of exterior functions, and from this point of view it is manifest that the active life hinders the contemplative, in as much as it is impossible for any man to be at once occupied with exterior actions and at the same time apply himself to Divine contemplation."

² "As convents of nuns situated outside the walls of cities or towns are exposed to the danger of falling a prey to wicked men and other evil-doers, Bishops and other Superiors should take care, if they deem it expedient, to transfer these communities to other convents in cities or populous towns for greater security, and that the aid of the civil arm be invoked, if need be, to bring it about."—Council of Trent, sess. xxv.

³ "No nun after her profession may go forth from the convent . . . except for some legitimate reason approved by the Bishop."—Council of Trent, sess. xxv.

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more strictly and exclusively contemplative than had been customary in pre-Reformation times in England.

To give effect to these ideas, the Divine Office—the *Opus Dei*, as St. Benedict calls it—was given in the new foundation its traditional importance, a great part of the time of the religious being devoted to its recitation. Every night the Matins bell rang the nuns to choir at 12.15, and more or less of the Divine Office was chanted, and often the whole of Lauds, according to the dignity of the feast. It must have been often 2 o'clock in the morning before the Sisters could snatch a short rest, till the bell again summoned them at 6.30 to renew the praises of God at Prime. This was followed by half an hour of mental prayer, and then the Communion Mass was celebrated. A short interval of rest was then allowed, and again at 10 o'clock the Sisters assembled for the solemn Conventual Mass, which was often sung. Dinner usually was at 11, Vespers (invariably sung) at 3, Compline at 6.30. Besides the Divine Office, there was half an hour of mental prayer in the afternoon, and at 8 the doubtless weary Sisters retired to rest. With such a full day of prayer, one is almost disposed to wonder what time they could find for anything else, yet we know that they did do other things. Besides a fair amount of manual labour, they found time for serious reading. Such a varied selection of books as St. Gregory's "Morals," the writings of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, St. Gertrude, to mention only a few of them, found place in their library and were in constant use. Their work, too, as transcribers and translators of ascetical writings

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was so remarkable as to elicit words of praise from Father Rudisind Barlow and others. A high standard of mortification was reached and maintained in the refectory. Flesh meat was excluded from table through the whole of Advent and Lent; indeed, even during the rest of the year, for the most part, there were two or three days' abstinence in the week. The fast days, also, were far more numerous than anything that the Church prescribes.

With a life so mortified and so fully occupied, it may well be supposed that the dames had but little leisure or inclination for external intercourse, or for going abroad, even if it had been permitted. But this avenue, as I have already intimated, was closed to them. They held but little intercourse with the outer world, except, perhaps, by correspondence.¹

The external discipline and observance, however, of the new foundation was comparatively easy to dispose of and arrange. The real difficulty lay in the religious training, and still more in the formation of the interior life of these young, inexperienced, but well-disposed maidens. To meet the former want, three discreet nuns were borrowed from the English Benedictine Convent at Brussels. The first of these was Dame Frances Gawen. She had been twenty-eight years in

¹ In a letter to a friend (Sir Richard Cotton) Father Baker wrote: "They [the nuns] are enclosed and never seen by us, nor by any other, unless it be rarely on extraordinary occasion; but on no occasion may they go forth, nor any man or woman get to them." It is interesting to note that the observance at Stanbrook Abbey, the lineal descendant of the Cambay foundation, is in substantial agreement with the parent house, the grille having been replaced and strict enclosure restored some twenty-five years ago.

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religion in the convent at Brussels, and was chosen for her maturity, prudence, and charity, to rule the young community as their first Abbess. This office she fulfilled for the space of six years, "ever more earnestly desiring and labouring," as her chronicler puts it, "to advance the progress of the community in all respects." After ruling the community for six years, she retired into private life, and, to quote again the words of her chronicler, "edified her Sisters with good examples of humility and obedience, practising amongst them in her life and conversation what she had taught them with great zeal." She died at the age of sixty-four, after a long and tedious illness, which she bore with much patience. With Dame Frances came Dames Pudentiana Deacons and Viviana Yaxley. Dame Pudentiana had been eighteen years in religion in the convent at Brussels, and appears to have been an edifying religious, and a careful observer of regular discipline. She was distinguished for her good natural abilities and sound understanding and judgment, and was appointed to the offices of Novice-Mistress and Prioress. She also held the office of Procuratrix, and is said by her chronicler to have diligently discharged her duties, "uniting great zeal of regular observance with a motherly affection to all and care of all." She suffered much from continual infirmities, which she bore with great patience. She died at Cambray, at the age of sixty-four.

Dame Viviana had only been professed five years when she was chosen to assist in the new foundation. But though so young in years, she was remarkable for her "quiet and religious carriage," and was on that

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account deemed suitable for the work in hand. She spent twenty-seven years at Cambray, filling at divers times the office of Mistress of Novices and Juniors and Prioress, in all which, says her chronicler, "she made appear her cordial desire of the good of the convent, her spiritual discretion, and zeal of regular discipline, and of the true advancement of those under her care, together with a motherly consideration of their infirmities." At length, seeing the convent firmly established in discipline and regular observance, she allowed her love of her old home to prevail, and at her own request was transferred again to Brussels, where she ended her days happily.

Excellent¹ as were the three nuns from Brussels, the selection of a Confessor, on whom so much depended for the spiritual training of the young religious, was not by any means so happy. Indeed, considerable difficulty appears to have been found in securing one with the requisite qualifications for the important task. Confessors appear to have followed one another in quick succession in the early days, each, on being found deficient, giving place to another. They were mostly men of maturity, who had been for years on the English mission, and, as they pathetically confessed, were more accustomed to studying how to work the salvation of straying souls than to directing contemplative souls (*Confessions*, vii.). The result obtained of these inefficient though well-meaning Confessors was far from satisfactory. Dame Gertrude wittily sums

¹ Father Rudisind Barlow, writing to the Procurator in Spain, says : " I got from the dames of Brussels three of the best qualified of all their company to be their guides."—January 3, 1624.

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them up by saying that they "all agreed in points necessary to salvation ; but as to what were the means and way to attain to perfect union with God, she could not at all learn " from them.

It is to the credit of the President, Father Rudisind Barlow, that he was fully aware of the need of a skilful instructor, and he appears to have assured Dame Gertrude that, if a suitable director could not be discovered in the Order, he would not hesitate to search the whole world over till one were found.¹

It will be well to enter a little more fully into the difficulties of these young religious. Here were nine young fervent souls, eagerly desirous to serve God in an internal life to which their interior propensities strongly inclined them. They enjoyed abundant solitude and abstraction from all distracting employments and conversations, but for the food of their interior life they knew of nothing but vocal prayer and that kind of mental prayer which is known as meditation. This they found to be wholly insufficient, for not only were most of them without any natural aptitude for discursive prayer—which prevented them from reaping much benefit from it—but also on account of the solitude and abstraction of their lives and the innocence of their bringing up, they had little need to chase away distracting images by such exercises of the imagination. Through want, therefore, of suitable

¹ Dame Gertrude's words are that Father President "would have sought over all the world most willingly to have found and procured one who could give satisfaction to our souls, for which humility and charity of his, I beseech Thee, my Lord, to reward him as beseemeth Thy infinite goodness."

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instructions how to address themselves to God internally by a more effectual way, it is not surprising that some of them found their spiritual exercises dry, tasteless, and even burdensome, instead of being the support and life of all other duties. In the minds of some, notwithstanding their goodwill, there arose scruples, fears, and dissatisfaction at seeing themselves unable to comply properly with that duty for the sake of which principally they had left the world.

Dame Gertrude was amongst the greatest sufferers. She has recorded in her "Confessions" how she had recourse to any that she heard of as having skill in internal ways, and no book that she heard recommended or could lay her hands on was neglected, but all to no purpose: for none of her counsellors was practised in internal affective prayer, wherein alone lay the remedy.

But God, out of compassion for tender souls, whose grief consisted only in not knowing how to love Him as much as they desired, at last, when they least looked for it, sent them the spiritual guide they so much needed. Father Augustine Baker was at this time staying at Douay. He had come there, as he believed, under a Divine impulse, but had not settled down, feeling that the Spirit of God destined him for some other place. Father Rudisind Barlow thereupon decided to send him to Cambray, not only as a place likely to be more congenial, but also hoping that he might prove a spiritual comfort and guide to his novices, and be able to imprint on their minds and hearts a true spirit of recollection and internal prayer that would serve them through life. Thus it came

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about that Father Baker was sent to Cambray—not, indeed, in the capacity of Vicar, but as a boarder. At the same time, Father Barlow wrote to the Mistress of Novices, recommending Father Baker to her as a most spiritual man who was well able to assist her novices to acquire a true interior spirit. He, moreover, gave general leave to the novices to have recourse to him. Many of these who, through prudence, had made little complaint, but had really suffered considerably from the want of direction, now hastened to avail themselves of the permission, and soon found the benefit of his instructions. The Novice-Mistress, too, at first much appreciated Father Baker, and gave her novices every encouragement. But zeal for his teaching did not last long. A change of feeling came over them, and novices and Mistress began to drop off, till none was left save Dame Catherine Gascoigne, who from the first fully appreciated the course into which Father Baker put her, and she never relinquished it, for which perseverance she no doubt reaped an abundant reward.

This apparent failure, however, did not discourage Father Baker, who appears to have had a secret assurance from God that his words would not fall upon stony and unproductive ground. He awaited, therefore, God's time in patience. Meantime, he continued to reside at Cambray till Chapter, which met in the following year, 1625, and in all probability he would have been removed from Cambray had not Dame Catherine Gascoigne, who was now professed, interposed, and besought the President to allow him to remain. Returning to Cambray after Chapter, Father Baker

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became Confessor to the Community till the newly-appointed Vicar should arrive. The choice of Chapter fell upon Father Edward Maihew,¹ but he appears to have been in failing health, as he did not long survive his appointment. He arrived at Cambray, and passed away towards the middle of September, scarcely two months after his nomination. Father Maihew was followed, though probably after a considerable interval, by Father Edward Benedict Smith, who appears to have been much away from the convent on business; for Cressy states that during the six years following the Chapter of 1625, Father Baker discharged the duties of Confessor to the nuns on various occasions for periods which amounted in all to about three years.

It was at the commencement of this period that Father Baker's spiritual work for the convent began in earnest. Several of the Sisters who tried him at the beginning, but fell away, now returned to him, and again placed themselves under his direction, following carefully his instructions, and this time with excellent results. One of the last to submit herself to his influence was Dame Gertrude herself. Often would she exclaim, as she marked how much better and more at peace some of her Sisters were through his instructions: "Ah, it is well for you that you can get good from them, for I can get none." At last, on the advice of her Mistress, she made another attempt, and this

¹ He was the first to receive the full authority of *Vicarius Monialium*. Besides being Confessor, the office of Vicar gave special authority over the nuns, so that they could do nothing of importance without his approval. This office was abolished about the year 1885.

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time with more success. She thus describes in her "Confessions" the change which came over her: "Having received some general instructions about prayer and other things, and having put them in practice as best I could, within fifteen days after I found myself so quieted in soul that I wondered at myself, and found myself fitted with instructions and satisfied. . . . It also made any cross thing that happened very tolerable to me, and made me capable of understanding anything that was necessary for me in a spiritual life," etc. So marked was the change produced in Dame Gertrude that it attracted the attention of her Sisters, and others who had never before been under Father Baker's direction now resolved to give him a trial. He had practically all the Sisters now under his guidance, and wonderful was the progress they made in an incredibly short time. Peace reigned in their hearts, prayer and recollection were pursued, and their whole exterior conduct indicated a marked change for the better.

Not only were the Sisters encouraged to approach Father Baker by the excellence of his teaching, but also by the meekness and simplicity of his manner with them, so that even the most timid and shy amongst them were able to disclose their troubles to him freely. Still, he was careful to hinder any natural tenderness or affection from arising in their minds towards himself. Indeed, it was one of his principal endeavours to cut off all dependence upon himself as soon as possible, teaching his disciples and putting them in the way to attend to, and follow the guidance of, the Divine Spirit only. Hence, as soon as he had given his disciples certain

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general instructions for their prayer, he left them to themselves, and, so far from examining them on their progress, he, on the contrary, advised them not to mispend their time by needless narrations or manifestations to him.

Superiors observing the benefit resulting from Father Baker's instructions, took care to accommodate their orders and the observance of the house to his methods, so that several customs and practices which were thought prejudicial were laid aside.¹ Thus regular order and peace reigned in the community. And afterwards many declared that if it had not been for Father Baker they would have passed their lives in much dejection and misery—not, indeed, from want of goodwill or a sound vocation, but only from the need of help how to transcend their fears and scruples, and how to have immediate recourse to God in their interior.

The method of Father Baker's direction is fully unfolded in the following pages, but perhaps, for greater clearness, it will be useful to gather together here the underlying principles of his teaching. Father Baker's great aim was ever to bring the soul into immediate contact or relation with God. To this end he demanded that the soul should give unremitting attention and obedience to Divine calls and inspirations. The Divine calls are made known to the soul by the Rule, constitutions, observances, and regulations

¹ The principal change introduced at the suggestion of Father Baker was the hour of the evening mental prayer. The time arranged at first appears to have been more conducive to sleep than to union with God.

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of the house, commands of Superiors, occurrences or accidents over which she has no control—all these are to be esteemed as the utterances of the voice of God ; and the soul is to comply with what is enjoined by them, as in obedience to God Himself. Then, as regards the conduct of the soul in indifferent matters—matters that do not come under any external regulation, as, for example, the manner of making prayer, way of exercising virtue, employment of time in one's cell, whether to speak or be silent, whether to ask for a permission or not, etc.—in these and similar cases which might be multiplied indefinitely, Father Baker did not give the soul liberty to make her own choice, but he still required her to subject herself to God, as in the former cases, and to act according to His inspiration and in obedience to Him. Thus the soul is ever kept in immediate communion and relation with God, and all that she does and all that she refrains from doing is in obedience to God. In this way the soul's whole life becomes one of prayer. For her recollection will differ from the rest of her life in this principally—that during her recollection she will be wholly employed upon God ; whereas at other times she will endeavour to carry out in her life what she saw in her recollection to be God's will, seeking at the same time to abide in His presence, and to perform her actions as under His eye, in obedience to Him, and purely for His love.

To practise this manner of life effectually, recollection, mortification, silence, and abstraction, are absolutely necessary. Recollection is requisite, for this is the way by which God is approached and where He is found ; mortification, because the soul

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must deny herself in many things if she is to attend to God and obey His commands and inspirations; silence, because it is impossible, unless for the perfect, to converse much with others without being withdrawn from interior attention to God; abstraction, because if the soul pours herself out upon external occupations and interests, she will lose command over herself, and be unable to obey God, even if she should perceive His internal admonitions. Hence Father Baker insists so much, as will clearly be seen in the following pages, upon these practices as a necessary condition, and even the very atmosphere, of an interior life.

It will be readily seen what a subordinate part the external director plays in such a system. His business principally consists in bringing the soul into touch with God, and in encouraging her to adhere to her course of attention and obedience. And when once the soul has established relations with God, He Himself becomes her director, and then but seldom has the soul need to turn to her external director for help.

The esteem in which Father Baker's teaching was held by the Congregation is clearly demonstrated by the conduct of its President, Father Rudisind Barlow. On one occasion when he was on a visit to Cambray he found fault with a Sister for holding back from Father Baker, and declining to seek his assistance. The Sister defended herself by saying that she thought his doctrine too high and extraordinary; whereupon Father Barlow replied that "Father Baker's directions differed from others in this: that others taught to go round about by a broad, beaten road, but he taught a soul to pass over hedge and ditch, the direct way to

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God, and to permit nothing to stop a soul, nor any impediment to remain between a soul and God." On another occasion a young man¹ who was thinking of embracing the religious life went to Father Barlow to ask him what he was principally to aim at in that state. Father Barlow at once referred the young man to Father Baker, advising him to go to Cambray, that he "might be by him fully instructed."

It is not to be supposed that a course of spirituality so much esteemed by prudent men, and producing, as we have seen, such striking effects in souls, could long escape the malice of Satan. Where God sows His seed, there will Satan follow with his tares. Where God's working is bringing forth much fruit, there will the enemy of souls stir up opposition. It would not be necessary to make more than a passing allusion to the hostility in this case, were it not that our author makes frequent reference to it in the following pages, and calls attention to the intense suffering and distress to which Dame Gertrude was subjected in consequence. It will be best, therefore, to gather together and set forth the facts as far as they have come down to us.

It will be remembered that Father Baker discharged on various occasions the duties of Confessor to the nuns²

¹ This was Father Peter Salvin. He joined St. Gregory's and died in 1675.

² It would seem probable that the duty of Confessor was discharged by the Vicar, and though Father Baker held faculties, he exercised them only in the absence of the Vicar. The confessional seems to have been used principally for the administration of the Sacrament of Penance ; direction and instructions were given at the grate.

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during a considerable part of the period between the Chapters of 1625 and 1629, and it was during these four years that the seed was sown, and the nuns were firmly established in their spiritual course.¹ At the General Chapter of 1629 Father Smith resigned his office, and Father Hull was appointed Vicar in his stead. In due course Father Hull took up his work, and for a time all went smoothly. But ere long the Vicar appears to have formed an adverse opinion of Father Baker's teaching, grounded, it would seem, on conclusions arrived at from stray observations of the latter, and from exaggerated and inaccurate statements of some of the religious. Father Cressy thinks that the Vicar was largely influenced "by a natural suspiciousness of mind, not unmixed with jealousy at being neglected, and Father Baker alone sought after." Whatever may be the explanation of the Vicar's conduct, it is difficult not to feel some sympathy for him; his position, to say the least, was not a little embarrassing. Having formed this adverse opinion of the teaching of Father Baker, he was not slow to use all the authority of his position as Vicar and Confessor, by rebukes and threats of eternal damnation, to withdraw the religious from their spiritual course and guide. We can well conceive the suffering which would be inflicted by such conduct on these timid, and in some cases even scrupulous, souls. Father Baker, in the

¹ During the first two years Father Baker, in spite of the earnest prayers of his disciples, confined himself to oral instructions, but at the end of the second year (about 1627) he yielded to their entreaties, and began to write. Nearly all his spiritual treatises were written during the following six years.

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following pages, makes clear the dilemma in which they found themselves. On the one hand, there was the fear of disobeying one to whom they owed a measure of obedience. On the other hand, they saw the interior peace and spiritual profit which they derived from their course, and other indications of a Divine sanction, so that to abandon their course at the bidding of man seemed like obeying man rather than God. Father Baker shows plainly that in Dame Gertrude's case it was the greatest trial and affliction of her whole life. No doubt the religious had the support and encouragement of Father Baker all through this trying time, yet even so the torture to such timid souls must have been immense. Dame Gertrude also appears to have been a tower of strength to her Sisters, encouraging them by her cheerful confidence in God and by solid arguments.

The opposition to Father Baker's teaching reached the culminating point when Chapter met at the end of the quadriennium in 1633. For Father Hull, not content with attempting to withdraw the religious from their spiritual course, now submitted to General Chapter his fears that the way of prayer taught by Father Baker contained hidden dangers for souls. General Chapter thereupon commanded both Father Baker and the Vicar to render respectively a brief account of their method of direction for souls tending to contemplation. In due course the two statements were sent in, and after a careful scrutiny the report of Father Baker was unanimously approved. Furthermore, a form was compiled out of the very words and embracing the entire sense of Father Baker's teaching, and with it

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was incorporated the opening sentences of the Vicar's statement, in which he pointed out how far he was in agreement with Father Baker. This form was submitted to them and was signed by both.

Father Sigebert Bagshaw, the then President, who had been somewhat prejudiced in the Vicar's favour, was now thoroughly convinced of the futility of the charges against Father Baker's teaching; and before his death, which took place during this very Chapter (1633), he wrote to the Abbess¹ at Cambray, a faithful

¹ This was Dame Catherine Gascoigne, one of the nine original novices, a chosen soul, who from the beginning placed herself under the direction of Father Baker, and never faltered for an instant in the course into which he led her. So much progress did she make in prudence and virtue that she, together with Dame Gertrude More, was deemed worthy, after she had been only six years in religion, to be promoted to the responsibilities of Abbess. The names of both nuns were sent up to General Chapter of 1629, but as neither she nor Dame Gertrude had as yet attained to canonical age, it was necessary to make application to the Holy See for a dispensation. The document is sufficiently interesting to be worth transcribing here in a free translation. It runs as follows: "Most Holy Father,—The Procurator of the English Benedictine Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict implores Your Holiness to grant a dispensation to Gertrude More, great-granddaughter of the noble Thomas More, who suffered for the faith in England, she being only twenty-five years of age, and Catherine Gascoigne, who is twenty-eight years of age; and to grant that, notwithstanding their deficiency of age, either of them may be elected Abbess or Prioress of the monastery of the Blessed Virgin of the English Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict, in the Diocese of Cambray, situated in the same town of Cambray, and exempt from the jurisdiction of the Diocesan; and if it seem good to the President and Definitors of the English Congregation to whom the said monastery is subject, that they may be again elected to these

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disciple of Father Baker, in these words : " As you may see, we have not touched any of the substance of Father Baker's doctrine as to his course of mental prayer and tending to God, for *that* we all judged to be good and solid," etc. Father Claude White, succeeding to his office after his death, wrote a public letter addressed to

offices at the end of the quadriennium. For whereas the said monastery has been erected six years only, and no nuns have the number of years, either in age or in religion, required for the abbatial charge, and yet one of them must be elected Abbess, the Congregation desires these two especially to be eligible to the office, because they precede the rest in the habit, in discretion, and in regular observance, and have fulfilled other minor offices with distinction. Gertrude, for whom they desire the preference, is also the principal foundress of the monastery. No detriment or error in the government of the monastery is to be feared from their lack of age, since, besides the Confessor [*i.e.*, Vicar], without whose consent they can do nothing of great moment, the Superior [*i.e.*, the President] is also the appointed Ordinary of the said monastery, who will take care that the said Gertrude or Catherine shall not fall into any error. And for this favour, which God," etc. After further correspondence with the Holy See, the desired sanction was obtained. In the above application the preference appears to be given to Dame Gertrude, but ultimately the dignity was conferred upon Dame Catherine, who was blessed probably early in 1630. She ruled over the convent with much edification for nearly forty years, till she passed to her reward. Dame Catherine was born at Barnbow, in Yorkshire, and was the daughter of Sir John Gascoigne. He was descended, according to one authority, from the famous Lord Chief Justice who ordered the imprisonment of Henry V. when Prince of Wales. Two of her brothers were Benedictine monks, and a third became a secular priest. One of her sisters married a Stapleton, and was the mother of Father Benedict Stapleton, at one time President of the English Benedictine Congregation.

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the Abbess and community, and which was signed by himself and his secretary, Father Christian Goaverdt. In this letter he endeavours to allay the fears and apprehensions which the action of the Vicar had excited in their minds, assuring them that all the past opposition and hostility of their Vicar to their spiritual course and to the teaching of Father Baker was entirely founded upon mistakes and misunderstandings; and for their further satisfaction on that point, he enclosed with his letter the above-mentioned form, which begins thus: "Both of them do accord that the Divine calls, inspirations, inactions, influences of God's grace, joined with the frequent, humble use of the Sacraments of Christ, are the most noble and sublime means of spirituality, without which to endeavour to tend to contemplation and perfection were to endeavour to fly without wings. And that these calls and holy lights and inspirations are always to be regarded (but chiefly in prayer and spiritual conversation with God), and that whosoever neglecteth his interior, not hearkening to the interior voice or the allocution of the Holy Ghost, nor labouring to direct his exterior observances to taste God more sweetly, to see Him more clearly, to love Him more abundantly, and enjoy Him more intimately in His soul and spirit, can never attain to purity of intention or the spirit of contemplation, though he be ever so exact in external observances and austere in corporal mortifications."¹

¹ The rest of the form is to be found at the end of Father Baker's treatise "*Vox Clamantis*." This treatise is the actual relation which he submitted to Chapter. The "*Vox Clamantis*" has never been published.

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It is satisfactory to know that the Vicar fully accepted Father Baker's relation, and concurred with the decision of Chapter. And he declared at the time, and repeated the same afterwards, that he would never have raised all the stir and disturbance had he known how little ground there was for it all. And on his death-bed, according to the testimony of his Confessor, he professed himself ready to say to the whole community¹ how sorry he was if any of them had been prevented from reaping much fruit from Father Baker's teaching through his misapprehension and misunderstanding of the said Father's doctrine, or, rather, through certain abuses or practices which were falsely attributed to his teaching.

Though the greater part of the vindication of the teaching of Father Baker, and consequently of the spiritual course of the nuns, took place after the death of Dame Gertrude, it is pleasant to think that at least the letter of the President, Father Sigebert Bagshaw, reached Cambray in time to be communicated to her before her death. The President died on August 19, and in all probability his letter to the Abbess was written not later than the second week in August. This would give ample time for the good news to reach Dame Gertrude before her death, which took place on the 17th, just two days before the President. We can well imagine what joy and satisfaction filled the much-tried

¹ This statement rests on the authority of Cressy, but as Father Hull ceased to be Vicar after Chapter of 1633, being succeeded by Father John Meutisse (or Northal), and was residing at the time of his death at St. Malo, the words cannot be taken in a literal sense.

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hearts of the community on learning the contents of the letter ; it must have afforded special comfort to the dying nun. The subsequent letter of Father Claud White, with a more detailed account of the action of Chapter, could have reached Cambray only after the death of Dame Gertrude.

For the purposes of this biography I might leave the subject here ; but as the subsequent action of Chapter is so closely woven with the early history of this community, and caused their virtue, and indirectly the teaching which produced it, to shine out so brightly, I need make no apology for pursuing the subject further.

No sooner was the substance of Father Baker's teaching approved than Chapter proceeded to consider his writings. Though most of them had been formally approved and much commended by two of the most learned Fathers of the Congregation—Father Leander Jones and Father Rudisind Barlow—yet this, having been done at a time when no suspicion attached to his teaching, it might be supposed that the books were read with less attention and care than under the circumstances was desirable. Chapter, therefore, ordained that the said two Fathers, assisted by two other capable members of the Congregation, should scrutinize anew with all possible exactness the writings of Father Baker. The examiners assembled at Cambray, and were much impressed with the submission and obedience of the religious, who rendered up for inspection whatever they had, even the very least important papers, and in some cases their private devotions, written for their own use. As a result, the examiners not only testified to the solidity and sound-

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ness of the doctrine, but also acknowledged that they saw cause to admire very highly the effects of Father Baker's teaching. The deputed examiners, therefore, a second time renewed formally their approbation and commendation. On the conclusion of their labours, Father Leander addressed the whole community, commending the writings of Father Baker, and recommending them to the practice of the religious. Moreover, he praised the zeal they had shown in transcribing them. Father Rudisind also spoke to several of the community privately words to the same effect ; so that it may be said that seldom have the writings of anyone in any Congregation been so carefully scrutinized or more authentically approved. But the most striking testimony to Father Baker's teaching was undoubtedly the lives of his spiritual daughters. Their humble simplicity, their refined obedience and fervent devotion, deeply impressed the Fathers, so that one of them, who had had much experience in the direction of souls, observed that Father Baker had done more good among them than if he had wrought miracles. "For it was more than a miracle," said he, "that his doctrine and words should work so efficaciously in the heart that it had drawn them [the religious] out of their former so great darkness and error. And, by reason of his writings, which laid open the ways to the Divine light (so far above human learning), God had laid and left to the whole Congregation such a foundation for spirit, that if Superiors would do their part (as 'twas to be hoped they would) to see a right use made thereof, the Congregation would be a most perfect example and mirror of tru reformation to all others. Whereas, if

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they were neglected or discountenanced, a more severe account would be required, without all doubt, by Almighty God."

When one considers the origin of the fears about the safety of Father Baker's teaching, or the subsequent examination of his writings, or, finally, the striking fruits of his method of direction in the souls of his disciples, one is at a loss to understand how fears, or at least a diffidence about his teaching, could survive even to this day. It is sometimes said, "Give a lie a fair start, and truth will never catch it up," and the saying is not without its application here; for all the praise of the appointed examiners, the holy lives of Father Baker's disciples, and the retraction of the original author of the suspicion, have never been quite able to allay a certain distrust which originally arose in the mind of one man through a misapprehension of Father Baker's teaching.

After Dame Gertrude's death a number of papers were found in her cell, the value of which Father Baker was not slow to recognize. These he grouped into two parts, the one consisting of a collection of acts, which she had gathered from various sources, and which served in time of aridity, which was frequent in the early days of her religious life, to provide matter for prayer. This collection Father Baker arranged for publication, and it was issued at Paris in 1657, under the title of "The Holy Practices of a Divine Lover," or "The Sainctly Ideot's Devotions." The edition has been recently edited by Dom Hildebrand Lane Fox, a monk of Fort Augustus.

The other part of Dame Gertrude's papers—and the

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more interesting—consisted of her outpourings to God, reflections and thoughts which had occurred to her in prayer or at other times; with these she comforted herself in the time of need. This collection received the title of “*Confessiones Amantis*,” or “*A Lover’s Confessions, and Ideot’s Devotions*,” and was issued in the following year, 1658. This has been re-edited and revised, and is issued with the *Life*, but as a separate volume, for the convenience of those who wish to use it for their prayer.

Besides these writings, we have from Dame Gertrude’s pen a very able “*Apology for herself and her Spiritual Guide and Director*, Very Rev. Father Baker.” Father Baker cites a good deal from its text in her biography. In the original edition the “*Apology*” is printed as “*An Advertisement to the Reader*,” and constituted at once an introduction and a defence of the spirit of which the “*Confessions*” were the fruit. The importance of the “*Apology*” from this point of view is no longer great or urgent, but as it contains many gems of spiritual wisdom, I have preserved it and printed it in the Appendix. As to the *Life of Dame Gertrude*,¹ while modernizing its language and condensing its phraseology, I have endeavoured to keep closely to Father Baker’s sense and meaning, and to preserve the spirit and character of the original.

¹ Father Baker probably began the *Life* after he had edited Dame Gertrude’s papers, and these undertakings occupied his attention during the two years he remained at Cambray after her death. He was then removed to Douay, and thus severed his connection with the convent—a connection which had lasted in all eight years.

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It only remains to express the hope that those for whose sake and at whose request I have edited these writings may find in them a mirror, which will reflect for them something of the beauty and holiness of the lives of the first dames of Cambray, and which may help them to shape their lives in accordance with the model therein depicted.

B. W.-B.

ABBAY OF OUR LADY OF CONSOLATION,
STANBROOK,
Ascension Day, 1909.

AN ADVERTISEMENT TO THE READER

IN the relation that we mean here to make of a life I wish the reader not to expect any of those great external matters which, both in these days and in former times, are usually related. They are things above the condition of man, though assisted by ordinary grace ; and although they manifest the glory of God in Himself and His works, yet are they of that nature that we cannot or do not much turn them to edification or other good use. We are apt rather to turn them to curiosity, or a wonder, or at the most to the praise of the holy person by or on whom the things were acted, without further relation to the true benefits of the soul. Of this kind are those we have heard or read even in our present age—of miraculous fastings, abstinences, watchings, and other corporal and external doings, as raptures, visions, apparitions, revelations, and other supernatural and extraordinary operations, true or supposed. None of these great matters (the truth of which oft-times is very uncertain) shall the reader find in this present relation, but some other things more imitable and more tending

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to the edification of souls, and for use in this present age. Here he shall find the example of a religious virgin of very good parentage who, by nature and education in the world, was virtuous and innocent. She had a call from God to leave the world and become a religious. Accordingly, she left country and friends that were dear to her (as she was to them), and much temporal fortune, which she did enjoy and might still have enjoyed if she would have remained in the world. He will see how she, simply coming over and entering into an Order which of its nature was contemplative (as are most enclosed Orders for women), became professed and settled therein; and having still in her a good will towards God, she, for all that, could not tell how, nor find the means for a long time by which, she might serve God in soul, as she ought and desired, or satisfy her own conscience and call from God. But, for want of this, she extremely and miserably decayed in what was good in her by nature and education, without increase in anything that was supernatural.

Then it will be shown how she, by the help of God, found the means of entering into a spiritual course consisting of prayer and mortification. She prosecuted her prayer with industry and diligence, and by means thereof there began to revive (animated by grace) that which was naturally good in her. And she increased much in grace, and attained to contemplation, which wrought in her humility and a total subjection to God and obedience

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to man, according to the Divine will. Thereby she at once satisfied God, her own soul and conscience, her Superiors and others with whom she lived, and in such fashion spent the rest of her days, and happily died therein.

The forepart of the ensuing work is, as it were, a prelude, specifying her birth, parentage, vocation to religion, her coming over for that purpose, and her expectation afterwards to be clothed with the holy habit.

The residue, containing her life and death in religion, may be distinguished into four general periods.

The first station contains about the space of two years, in the beginning of which she took the habit. In this part is shown how that she, having a call to an internal life, could not find the means to enter into it.

The second station begins with the end of the said two years, and covers the six years following. At the beginning of this period she found the means and way to become recollected and to lead an internal life, wherein she continued thenceforth during the rest of her days.

The third station is from the end of the said six years for the space of the two years following. In this period is related a certain great and extraordinary affliction and probation of soul, which God provided or permitted to fall upon her, and which continued during these two years, and was a very great and good preparation for a happy death.

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The fourth and last station is from the end of the aforesaid two years till her death, being the space only of about eighteen or nineteen days. In this period is shown her behaviour in the time of her last sickness and her disposition and preparation for a good death, and, lastly, her happy demise.

I have not further observed the order of the said stations, but have sometimes intermingled the matter of the one with the matter of the other, bringing some things in one place which were properly pertaining to another. But the reader, having this warning from me, may easily supply such disorder or defect by referring each thing to its proper place.

I have been so full in expressing the particulars of our virgin's life, because I have heard divers well-minded souls, apt for an internal life, bemoan that they could get little benefit by books which daily come forth of the lives and examples of holy persons, because these books do rarely specify the nature of their spiritual exercises in their internal carriage, wherein radically true spirituality and perfection consist. When treating of their prayer and mortification these writers speak in a general manner, without distinguishing the nature thereof; and they tell us of their external doings, and not of their internal demeanour, which is the best kind of knowledge for us, as being the root of the external, and the life and goodness that are in it.

These authors tell us of the sanctity and perfection

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of those whose lives they treat, but tell us not of the means which brought them thereto, being principally their internal doings, whence all external good proceeds. Or they tell us of miracles, the knowledge of which is not of such use and profit as examples that instruct us for our practice. These considerations have made me express, as best I could, the particular manner, both internal and external, held with and by our virgin, wishing what good may come by it to whomsoever shall take the pains to read it.

But, indeed, I have especially insisted upon one general point, which contains in it all necessary particulars, and without the knowledge and observation of which all the particular instructions in the world are insufficient to bring a soul into an internal contemplative life ; and yet this is a point not usually much handled in spiritual books, nor in the lives of spiritual persons. And the point is this : the observation of the internal Divine lights and inspirations or calls, which were the principal or only master or guide of the religious virgin whose life we are to treat of, as will appear in the Life itself. Without the knowledge and practice of this doctrine by her, her soul would never have been satisfied or happy. And no more will other souls be who have in them an aptitude and call to an internal contemplative life.

Lastly, I am to admonish that the doctrine contained in this Life does not concern (as regards

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imitation) any but those who have in them an aptitude and call to an internal life, which not all intelligent souls (nor even the greater part) have. These latter should either not read these things at all or read them with such care that they do not misunderstand what is said. And let them not take upon themselves to practise that which in no sort pertains to them, though they be otherwise of a good spirit; for if they act otherwise, instead of benefiting themselves as they intended, they will more likely harm themselves. Indeed, it may well be that the reason why spiritual authors do not more frequently handle in particular these matters of inspirations and internal conduct is the peril to which some indiscreet readers might be exposed by misunderstanding or misapplying their instructions. But the warning we have now given on this point, I hope, or at least wish, may serve to prevent all such danger.

AUGUSTINE BAKER.

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THE INNER LIFE OF DAME GERTRUDE MORE

CHAPTER I

DAME GERTRUDE MORE'S EARLY LIFE

I REGARD the life and death of Dame Gertrude More worthy of record, because, as we shall see, there is good reason for thinking that she is now a happy soul in Heaven. Hers was a soul led in a somewhat extraordinary way, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as may be gathered from her own writings, and from what I can add of my own knowledge, and from other credible sources.

Gertrude More's parents were devout Catholics, and belonged to two distinguished families that adhered to the Faith, and, indeed, had suffered in that cause. Her father was Mr. Crisacre More, lineally descended from the illustrious martyr, blessed Sir Thomas More, and was owner of as much of the martyr's wealth as Queen Mary of England had been able to restore to the family. Crisacre More was the son of Thomas More, and grandson of John, the son and heir of Sir Thomas More. Mr. More received the name of

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Crisacre at his baptism in memory of the Crisacres, a Yorkshire family settled not far from Doncaster. The last of the Crisacres married John, the eldest son of Sir Thomas More, and it was through her that the Mores derived most of their property, as the greater part of Sir Thomas's possessions were confiscated upon his attainder, and only a small portion of them, as we have seen, was recovered by the family.

Dame Gertrude's mother was sister to Sir John Gage, Bart., of Firle, in Sussex. Sir John was the lineal descendant and heir of the Sir John Gage who for many years was Comptroller of the Household under Henry VIII., and was afterwards made Lord Chamberlain by Queen Mary, and was much employed by her against Wyatt, the heretic and rebel. The Queen reposed much confidence in Sir John on account of his well-known sincerity in the Faith—a quality in which many faltered at that time, even among the greatest names in England.

Mrs. Crisacre More died young, leaving a son and two daughters. The elder daughter is the subject of this narrative; of her sister I shall speak presently. Dame Gertrude was only about four or five years old when her mother died, and her education, till she entered religion, was almost entirely conducted by her father. She was born at Loweleyton,¹ her father's house in Essex, on March 25, the Feast of the Blessed Virgin, in the year 1606, receiving the name of Helen in baptism, perhaps after the mother of Constantine, St. Helen, who is said to have been born at

¹ Low Leyton, as it is now written, lies a little to the south-west of Epping Forest.

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Maldon in Essex. On embracing the religious state Helen took the name of Gertrude, in honour of the great Benedictine Saints who have borne it, notably the St. Gertrude¹ who is otherwise known as St. Trutha.

It is no great marvel that a singularly holy soul should proceed from a family so devout. For not only was Gertrude's mother a very devout woman, but her father also and his brothers and sisters were all very religious persons. Crisacre More was the youngest son. Thomas, one of the brothers, became a priest, and died young at Rome, while acting as Procurator, at his own cost, for the English secular clergy. Another brother was professed at Amiens in the Order of Minims, founded by St. Francis de Paula, and died there. Crisacre More himself spent ten years in English seminaries studying philosophy and theology, with the view to becoming a priest; but on the death of his elder brother he was reluctantly persuaded by his father and friends to abandon the ecclesiastical state, lest the Catholic branch of the family should die out, and the estates pass into the hands of strangers, Crisacre being the only one of the surviving brothers at liberty to marry. As to the sisters, they were all married but one, who declined to take up the burden of the marriage state. They were all women of much prayer and piety, according to their state and condition.

Crisacre More was soon to lose the society of his wife. After four or five years she died, and Crisacre, though still young and healthy, did not seek another wife, but remained single to the end of his days. Crisacre More's only son at first sought to escape

¹ This is St. Gertrude the Great.

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matrimony, being much attracted to the religious state, but, like his father, and for similar reasons, he at length yielded to the persuasions of his friends, and took a wife. Crisacre More's other daughter, three or four years younger than Dame Gertrude, remained in the world some time after her sister. And though much sought after in marriage, and her father able to give a handsome dowry, she always refused to abandon her single state, till at length, at the age of eighteen, she joined her sister at Cambray, and was professed, taking the name of Bridget. There her life was passed, to the profit and satisfaction of her soul, and the edification of others.

Of Mr. Crisacre More's parents, brothers, and sisters not much must be said, lest I become too diffuse. They were all of singular piety and steadfast in religion. Mr. Crisacre More's mother was a Scroope, and a member of the distinguished family of which the head bore the title of Lord Scroope. Both Mr. and Mrs. More lived to a ripe age, endured the long and severe persecution under Queen Elizabeth, brought up their children piously, and at their own expense educated their sons at the English College at Rheims. Their daughters, though pious, did not embrace the religious state, partly because no religious houses existed in England, and partly because the religious state for women was not well understood at that time, the practice of former days being almost forgotten.

Dame Gertrude lived for the most part with her father in England till she attained her eighteenth year, Of this period of her life I have little to say—partly because I was not at that time acquainted with her,

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partly because little about it has reached me from others, and partly also because, from what I have gathered, there was nothing supernatural or notable about her from a spiritual point of view at that time. She was, however, of a good disposition, gentle, affable, kind, docile, merry and pleasant, and of quick understanding and sound judgment for her years. Her father derived so much pleasure from her society and conversation, that it greatly alleviated his otherwise solitary life. Indeed, he loved her so well that he intended, out of his abundant means, to bestow on her a very liberal marriage portion should the occasion arise. This, however, was not to be. Her Confessor, Father Benet Jones, an English Benedictine, much esteemed, observing her good dispositions, suggested to her that she should embrace the monastic state, of which hitherto she had heard little. But nothing definite was decided upon, as Gertrude did not seem to understand sufficiently the nature of the state, or at least its special fitness for herself. Two or three years later, however, after the subject had been well considered and discussed with her father as well as with her Confessor, the conclusion was arrived at that Gertrude should proceed to France and make trial of her vocation to the religious life. Father Benet Jones had under his direction some other holy women, who also desired to try their vocations to the religious life in an English Benedictine convent. But at that time there was no convent subject to the English Benedictines, and the dowries of these ladies were insufficient alone to found a house, so, after consultation with Mr. More and his daughter, it was arranged that Mr. More should contribute a sufficient

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sum to establish a house subject to the English Congregation. In due course these plans were carried out, and the following summer, in the year 1623, Gertrude and eight other gentlewomen crossed over to France, under the care of the above-mentioned Benedictine priest.

The postulants, on arriving at Douay, took up their abode in a good house, a refuge belonging to the Abbey of St. Vedast, at Arras, the Abbot, Philip Caverell, kindly allowing them the use of it till they could provide suitable accommodation for themselves. During her residence there Gertrude More fell seriously ill, and was in danger of death, but it pleased God to restore her to health.

Shortly after Michaelmas in the same year the little company of virgins moved to Cambray, some hope being entertained of making a foundation there. They took refuge temporarily at the Hospital of St. James. The town appeared to them very suitable for their purpose, and the Archbishop, Right Rev. Francis Van der Burgh, welcomed them so warmly that he not only encouraged them to settle there, but graciously yielded to their exemption from his jurisdiction and their immediate subjection to the English Benedictine Congregation.

Gertrude More was now in the middle of her seventeenth year, and was still resolutely bent on making trial of her vocation, and on discovering, if possible, more fully God's will in her regard. Mr. More, who hitherto had accompanied the devout women, about this time returned to England, and their Benedictine director, Father Barlow, who was now President of the

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Congregation, took these pious souls under his special care. About the Feast of All Saints, three nuns who had been secured from the Benedictine convent at Brussels to help in the foundation arrived at Cambray. They were Dame Frances Gawen, Dame Pudentiana Deacons,¹ and Dame Viviana Yaxley.

At the time when Gertrude More's vocation was under discussion, Mr. More acted with great liberality towards his daughter. Seeing that she had no inclination to marry, he offered her the choice of going abroad to try her vocation, or, at least, of residing in a convent for a time, to see the nature of the life exteriorly, or, finally, of remaining in England; and he undertook in any case to provide for her abundantly, both during his life and after his death. And well was Mr. More able to do this, for not only had he ample means, but also a very great affection for his daughter—an affection which she abundantly reciprocated; so that the thought of separation was most painful and repugnant to both of them. Indeed, Gertrude More was naturally of an exceedingly affectionate disposition, especially towards kindred and friends. Hence I do not marvel, but, on the contrary, think it very natural, that, her affections being once directed towards God, she should conceive a great sensible affection towards Him; and this, in fact, was the case, as will appear later from her writings and in other ways. Besides abundant natural affection, Gertrude More had a strong propensity towards God, partly the result of grace, and partly a natural endowment in which, as I think, the intellectual soul in some degree at least appeared to partake.

¹ Written also Potentiana or Prudentia Deakens.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW FOUNDATION AT CAMBRAY—DAME GERTRUDE RECEIVES THE HABIT

THE preparations for the new foundation were now advancing apace. Negotiations were in progress between the Benedictine Fathers and the Abbot of St. Andrews, a monastery of our Order at Cambresy, for the use of a certain refuge at Cambray, which belonged to the Abbey of Femey, and was united to the Abbey of St. Andrews. The result of the negotiations was that the Right Rev. Abbot Anthony de Montmorency kindly consented to the nuns having the use of the refuge, at least for a time.¹

The house,² or refuge, having been adapted for the use of our nuns, they took up their abode there on Sunday, December 24, 1623. The Archbishop honoured

¹ It was said that the Abbey itself of Femey was founded by three Englishmen.

² The house, which stood upon about half an acre of land, remained in the possession of the nuns till the French Revolution. After their expulsion the house and property passed through several hands, till it came into the possession of the Mairesse family. Little remains of the original convent buildings. There are now three houses standing upon the property. One house is occupied by Mr. Mairesse and family, another by Mdle. de l'Orne d'Alincourt, and the remaining one by Mme. Felix Petit. They are all devout Catholics, and it is interesting to note that Mass is celebrated daily in two of the houses.

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them with his presence on that occasion, and celebrated the first Mass in the chapel.

On the following Sunday, the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord, the nine postulants were solemnly and publicly clothed with the habit by the Archbishop, assisted by Father Rudisind Barlow, at that time President, and were placed under the jurisdiction of the Congregation, and exempted from episcopal authority.¹ The names of those who were admitted to the habit were as follows: First, there was the subject of our biography, Helen More, who took the name of Gertrude, by which I have hitherto called her: to her was given the first place; next came Margaret Vavasour, daughter of William Vavasour, of Hazelwood, in Yorkshire, who took the name of Lucy; then Anne, now called Benedicta, Morgan, sister of Thomas Morgan, of Weston, in Warwickshire; Catherine Gascoigne, daughter of John Gascoigne, of Barnbow, in Yorkshire; Grace, now called Agnes, More, and Anne More, cousins of Dame Gertrude, and descended also from Sir Thomas More; and Frances, now called Mary, Watson, daughter of Richard Watson, of Beckerings Park,² in Bedfordshire. Sister Mary Hoskins and Sister

¹ A few days after the clothing the President wrote a letter to the Procurator in Spain, in which the following passage occurs: "We have begun our monastery of nuns at Cambray with great honour and edification; there be twelve religious women, as fine dames as I have seen and virtuous souls. From their house I write this, for here I am staying, to see them settled and put in order. I got from the dames at Brussels three of the best qualified of all their company to be their guides." The letter is dated January 3, 1624.

² Beckerings Park is sometimes called "the Park" simply. It is parcel of the honor and manor of Ampthill, and was probably

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Jane Martin¹ were lay Sisters; the rest were choir nuns.

Dame Frances Gawen, one of the three nuns from Brussels, was appointed the first Abbess of the little community.

The following record of Dame Gertrude's clothing is found in a note in her own handwriting, and may be here inserted: "I entered the monastery of our Blessed Lady—for to our monastery had been given the name of our Blessed Lady of Comfort—in the 24th day of December, being a Sunday, and I took the habit in the 31st of the same month and year. I was professed in 1625, in the 1st of January, the Feast of the Name of Jesus, falling that year on a Wednesday, it being also the year of Jubilee. I was eighteen years old, and

a small portion of Ampthill Park, which was called "the Great Park." Ampthill was a royal domain, and Queen Catharine of Aragon resided there during the process instituted against her by Henry VIII. It is interesting to note that the Watsons were related to Father Thomas Whitebread (or Whitbread), S.J., the martyr.

¹ Jane Martin took the name of Martha, and was professed at the end of the year with the rest, but only survived five or six years, and, dying happily, was buried in the cemetery of the convent of Prémy, of the Order of St. Augustine, at Cambrai. There also was Dame Gertrude buried and another of the nuns, Dame Ebba Browne, as the convent at that time had not its own place of burial. The three buried at Prémy had a marble stone over each of their graves, and each had her name engraved thereon. At the time of the French Revolution the Augustinians were expelled from their convent, and the cemetery, passing into other hands, was partly built over, and all traces of its former use were obliterated. It now belongs to a Catholic family, Mr. and Mme. Georges Wiert, who have transformed it into a charming garden. It is no longer possible to identify the spot where Dame Gertrude's remains were laid.

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as much as from the 24th of March [*i.e.*, nine months].”

Now that I have brought Dame Gertrude into an enclosed convent, clothed her with the habit, placed her under the rule of an Abbess and the guidance of a Confessor, it is fitting that I should indicate, as far as I can, how she stood with regard to the religious state. I will not take upon myself to determine what call she had to religion. For the present I will confine myself to the following observations. It seems as if Dame Gertrude had no decided call to the world. She had no liking for the marriage state, nor for the riches or honours of the world. Still, while she lived in the world I cannot gather that she had any great devotion towards God and Divine things; but a firm believer she always was, and of a gentle, pleasing nature, of blameless life, and of good intelligence and judgment proportionate to her years. Her innocence and simplicity are evident from the fact that she was brought up almost entirely in her father's house in England, where good order was kept, piety observed, no evil example found, and little company entertained.

Nevertheless, how could Gertrude's nature be exactly discerned, as Simon witnesses of his son Pamphilius in Terence, when still young, and when the awe of authority hindered the full manifestation of her natural inclinations and desires? Her character and nature will be more fully disclosed after she entered religion, as the sequel will show.

In her “Confessions”¹ Dame Gertrude thus bears witness to the watchful care of her father: “Certainly my sins deserve to be punished in an extraordinary

The *Confessions* form the second volume of this publication.

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manner, because I committed them more wilfully than is ordinarily the case. Such was the carefulness of Thy servant my natural father that I should be kept out of all occasions of sin, that I might, seeing the nature Thou gavest me, have lived very innocently." A little farther she adds: "I beseech Thee to remember Thy true servant my father, who by his care prevented my further evil."

I think Dame Gertrude entered the religious state, as it were, blindfold, not well knowing what she did, being more drawn by her imagination and by what was said of the religious state than from any determinate purpose, till the time came for her to make her profession. And even at her profession, it is impossible to say whether she had any definite or distinct notion. I do not really think that she had a call from God that she could perceive. Having crossed, however, to France, and leading a life of greater seclusion and devotion than in England, she undoubtedly became better disposed for the religious life; and though as yet she perceived no call to it, not being in a disposition to perceive it, yet surely she had a true and effective call, as may be gathered from subsequent events. It seems as though God reserved the notification of His call till she entered into a course and state more capable of discerning it.

Having been clothed, God gave Dame Gertrude the grace to have a great desire to serve Him in the best manner. She had also a good judgment and understanding—indeed, in a somewhat extraordinary degree for her sex and years. Moreover, she was conveniently placed in a state of life where there were fewest impediments, and all the helps usually found in Contemplative

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Orders. Her vocation and aptitude certainly were to an internal life, and without the pursuit of it her soul would never be content in religion, nor would others be satisfied with her. But her difficulty lay in getting into her interior, and in learning how to lead an interior life. Indeed, she scarcely knew what an interior life meant, nor had she heard much about it; yet, nevertheless, she had a distinct call to it.

Dame Gertrude had two defects, or impediments, which hindered her from getting into her interior and leading an interior life. The one impediment was that she needed teaching, like any other soul, by God or by man, for of herself she could not discover the way. The other hindrance was her natural character. She was of a very extroverted¹ disposition, with an active imagination, and much prone to talking and recreations, and to every kind of interest imaginable, seeing no harm in them. Besides, she had now grown more scrupulous in some ways than was good for her—a further hindrance to an internal life. And how a natural disposition such as this could be brought into an internal course was the difficulty, and a very great one, both speculatively and practically. Reason and some light of grace made Dame Gertrude see that little or no perfection was to be found in external things considered as such, so she made small account of them,

¹ As the word *extroverted* will often occur in this book, the meaning of it had better be made clear. *Extroverted* means *turned outward*. It signifies that the eye of the soul is turned upon or taken up with outward things—sensible objects. The converse is expressed by the word *introverted*—i.e., turned inward—and expresses the idea that the eye of the soul is turned inward, and occupied with the thought of God and the Divine presence and spiritual things.

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though she performed them with as good intention and as well as she could. Still, her soul was not satisfied with them, nor with all that she did, and this chiefly, as I conceive, because she had a strong invitation or inclination to aspire to spiritual union with God, as will be seen more fully later. She knew that a true religious life consists chiefly in the interior, but she knew not how to do it or how to get into it, so that of necessity she led a wholly extroverted life, though still an enclosed religious, and obeying the external regulations of the Rule and the ordinances of the house.

For these reasons, Dame Gertrude was far from contented in her interior: her conscience daily became more burdened, and her imperfections grew apace. Indeed, every day she receded farther from perfection, and from God, and from the sight of her interior. Even her natural disposition began to deteriorate, and she grew deceitful, wilful, factious, and full of every kind of defect. And having a good capacity and a penetrating mind, she soon acquired all the subtleties, policies, and stratagems that may be learnt in a religious house where true spirituality does not flourish, and where the doctrine of self-abnegation is not practised.

By these means Dame Gertrude's character altered for the worse. Of this she was not insensible, for sometimes, when in her cell—which was but seldom save at bedtime—she would reflect upon her condition, and saw—as others, too, might see—how she decayed in natural and moral virtues, and bitterly deplored her state. God, indeed, gave her even at this time a good will to do better, to amend her life, and to tend to perfection; but, as we have seen, she knew not how to do it. She did, however, the best she could, but without avail.

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When Dame Gertrude was able to confer privately with an intimate friend—and she had great aptitude for friendships—she drew no good out of it, but, on the contrary, more often harm, by pouring out her griefs and complaints and discontentment; so that by such opportunities of extroversion she lost the benefit of the good inspirations and impulses she received in solitude and at her devotions.

As I have said, however, God gave Dame Gertrude a great desire to amend her life, and to this end she made use of all the means suggested by reason. She read all the books in the house, and all she could get from England,¹ that might serve her purpose, and read them seriously—and great store of books there were in the house. In particular, she read the whole of the Bible from beginning to end, besides special portions at divers times. All the men whom she thought at all likely to be able to set her in the right way she sought out when she could get access to them. She would seriously and acutely question them on points of prime importance—as, for instance, In what does perfection consist? By what means or exercises should she tend towards perfection? or, What were the means used by Saints of our Order or in other Orders to attain to holiness? and so forth. And so much to the point were her questions, that I verily believe that some of those she consulted had enough to do to find answers that appeared reasonably satisfactory to themselves.

Dame Gertrude's state of mind at this time and her difficulties are well depicted in the following passage

¹ There is extant at Stanbrook Abbey a copy of a letter from Father Baker, when he was chaplain to this community at Cambray, appealing to a friend in England for books for this convent.

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from her "Confessions": "For I had suffered so much before God did bestow the favour upon me of being put into a course that was proper for me, and that for nearly three years after my coming over, and had fallen into great inconveniences and miseries, that none could believe it, but I that felt it. And though I made a shift in the daytime to set a good face on it, yet at night I bewailed my miseries with more than ordinary tears, which God and our Blessed Lady were witness of, though few else on earth were. And yet I did rouse up and peruse all the books in the house, and whatever I found that any had done to please God I took notes of it, and did practise it as well as I could. And this course I had always held since I came into religion. I also used to consult with all the men I could meet, all that any other had found good by in the house. And all this would do me no good. I was still as great a stranger to Almighty God as I was in England, where I scarce thought, as to any good, whether there were any God or no. And being thus perplexed with a thousand imaginations, my Mistress¹ advised me to go to Father Baker, telling me that four or five in the house had found some good by him, and that at least it was no harm for me to try what good I might get by him."

Elsewhere in her writings Dame Gertrude affirms that her soul at this time "was grown to be as hard as a stone as to God and Divine things," and that nothing could have softened it save the special means which God provided for the purpose, as we shall presently see. By all I have said you will understand the difficulty that Dame Gertrude had in getting into her interior, or for others to bring her into it.

¹ The Novice-Mistress.

CHAPTER III

DAME GERTRUDE'S DIFFICULTIES

To turn now to another side of Dame Gertrude's life—her prayer. The Divine Office first claims our attention, and in this respect Dame Gertrude must certainly be called a good choir nun. Moreover, she had a good and powerful voice, both for singing and reciting, considering she was not strong. She always loved singing.

Both in choir and out of choir Dame Gertrude used vocal prayer and other external devotions, as much as others did. But these exercises gave her no internal light, nor satisfaction of soul or mind. She was advised, and herself desired, to use meditation or discursive prayer, but she found herself utterly unable to do it. Nor did any kind of internal consideration move her affections towards God, or help her to pray. And this inability (though in the end it proved to have its advantages) remained with her even till her death. Dame Gertrude's incapacity to meditate did not arise from any want of intelligence. For merely human and natural purposes she could speak with force and ability. And even on spiritual subjects, when thinking over some point, or when discussing it with another, she showed herself both capable and ready in the use of her

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imagination, and tongue, and pen. Of this her "Confessions" bear witness; and yet her writing was much inferior to her ability in conversation. The same praise may be given to her judgment, which was wonderful, considering her sex and years, and the absence of training in the schools. But when she attempted to turn her abilities to the exercise of meditation, and to move her will by considerations, she was quite at fault, and as unable to do it as if she had had no brains at all.

Dame Gertrude seemed to have four or five contradictory qualities that at first sight appear almost incompatible with one another. She was very merry, yet very much subject to sadness. She had a timid, scrupulous conscience, yet had much courage, boldness, and even hardiness. She had a propensity to extroversion, and yet a strong one also to introversion. So that in some respects none was more scrupulous and timid, and in others none freer and bolder; none more merry and cheerful, and yet none more prone to sadness, or easily cast into it; none more inclined to extroversion, and yet none had a greater call to, or more aptitude for, true introversion, but as yet she knew not how to do it. And, indeed, none but the Divine Spirit could teach her this, or bring about a reformation of her life. For what she needed was to be brought into a simplicity of soul which is the immediate disposition to union with God, and that can be done only by the Divine working with the soul's co-operation, aided by Divine grace. There was necessary also a reconciliation of the conflicting qualities and characteristics I have mentioned. All this Dame Gertrude fully realized even to the moment of her death, and this is the

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reason that both in her writings and in her practice (after she had once entered on the way) she paid such close attention to the Divine guidance or call, and that led her to choose for her motto the words :

“ Regard your call ¹
That's all in all.”

I have now indicated three of Dame Gertrude's contradictions; there is yet a fourth, which was at least usually present after she had made some progress in an interior life. She used to oscillate between periods of great and clear internal light and periods of the utmost obscurity. Her remedy was still to adhere during these periods of darkness to the practices she pursued in times of greater light.

Dame Gertrude's fifth hindrance was, as I have already indicated, her inability to use discursive prayer, or meditation.

While Dame Gertrude was still in her noviceship, and in the miserable plight which I have tried to depict, it happened that my Superiors sent me to Cambray,²

¹ As the word *call* and similar vocables often occur, it would be as well to define their meaning. By *call* is meant the speaking, or working, or action of God on or in the soul. Other terms are used to signify the same thing, as *Divine inspiration*, *Divine voice*, *Divine impulse*, *admonition*, *intimation of the Divine will*, *Divine call*, etc. There are reciprocal terms which regard the conduct of the soul—e.g., *conformity with the Divine will*, *obedience to the Divine voice*, *call*, etc.

² This event, which was to have such momentous results on the life of Dame Gertrude, took place about the middle of July, 1624. It may be noted that Father Baker at this point in his manuscript takes up a dual personality. He calls this priest from England *Anonymous*; and all through the *Life* it is always *Anonymous* who holds spiritual intercourse with the nuns. But as *Anonymous* was really Father Baker himself, I have, for the sake of clearness and

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intending me to make a considerable stay there. A proclamation had been lately published in England, banishing all priests, and, fearing the distraction that would result from the threatened persecution, I left England and went over to France, thinking, with leave of my Superiors, to return when the storm should blow over. I was not engaged in missionary work, but, with leave of my Superiors, I attended to myself, leading a retired, contemplative life—a manner of life I had pursued for some years.

The community in the course of the summer had increased by the addition of three new postulants. They were Margaret Yaxley, who received the name of Placida; Anne Temperly, who received the name of Scholastica; and a lay Sister, Flavia Browne. So that, together with the three nuns from Brussels, the community on my arrival numbered fifteen. I was hospitably entertained and lodged in the guest-house, which was outside the convent enclosure.

Before very long some of the religious, having heard that I had followed a retired and spiritual life, sought to speak with me, to obtain some spiritual direction at my hands. This they received, and for the time they were satisfied. All, however, did not adhere to the instructions, because they found or imagined that the advice was not suitable to their spirit. Some of the religious persevered. Now, Dame Gertrude, before she left England, had heard the kind of life I was leading; yet, in spite of this knowledge and her great need, she was last in all the house to seek help. The reason

simplicity, discarded the disguise, and made Father Baker and *Anonymous* identical, as in fact they were.

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was, as she afterwards acknowledged when she knew me better, that she found her own nature so averse to a life of retirement and recollection—as she conceived mine to be—that she said to herself: What can I have to do with such a man? In consequence, she not only did not seek to hold spiritual intercourse with me, but, if any there were, was among those who thought there was some peril in my method of direction, and that therefore I was safer left alone. And on this, as on other occasions, she took the lead, which was always conceded to her on account of her quick-witted tongue and her spirited character. Nevertheless, Dame Gertrude was most affable and courteous in her carriage—indeed, none more so than she; so that sometimes she would come to converse with me by way of entertainment, but not much on spiritual subjects.

About the end of November, still in the year of her noviceship, Dame Gertrude fell dangerously ill, but speedily recovered, and was quite well some time before the day of her profession, which was arranged for January 1.

All this time, there can be little doubt, Dame Gertrude had a clear call from God to serve and please Him in the best manner, and she had a very good will to do so, and corresponded with God, as far as she knew how and her frailty would allow her. But her knowledge being only natural, her reason in no way illuminated, her affections much given to creatures and to all kinds of extroversions, and not knowing how to become introverted, what amendment of life could be expected of her, or what satisfaction could she obtain for her own soul and conscience.

CHAPTER IV

DAME GERTRUDE MAKES HER PROFESSION

ALMOST a full year had rolled by since the clothing of Dame Gertrude and her eight companions, and the time of their profession was near at hand. This was arranged to take place on January 1, the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord. But though all was ready outwardly for the great event, there is reason to believe all was not ready inwardly—at least, in the case of Dame Gertrude. It appears to me that she was in considerable perplexity as to what she should do. On the one hand, she saw that she was full of defects, which she could not see her way to amend. In particular, through immortification, she entertained an aversion for her Superior, which made it very difficult to obey her as a Superior should be obeyed. In fact, it went against Dame Gertrude's conscience to make her profession in such a state and frame of mind. And yet, withal, as we have seen, she had a strong interior call from God to amend all, and to seek Him in the best manner. On the other hand, she saw many reasons—which, after all, were purely natural reasons—why she should make her profession as best she could. First, there was the maintenance of the house, which greatly depended for

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its very existence upon her dowry, and how much of it, if any, would be left by her father if she made not her profession was very problematic. Then, again, what was she to do if she did leave? She had as little wish to marry as ever she had. Besides, her having been in a convent for a time might, likely enough, hinder her from making as good a match as might otherwise have been the case. Moreover, she felt a certain sense of shame at the idea of returning to the world which she had abandoned for any reason other than sickness; and in this respect she had nothing now to complain of. These and similar considerations which she hints at in her "Confessions" she tossed to and fro in her mind, and they left her still undecided, even on the very eve of her profession day. In the end, however, she made her profession with the rest, taking, as before, the first place. The Archbishop who gave the Sisters the habit now received their vows, and performed the ceremony, the President, Father Rudisind Barlow, being also present.

Upon what grounds Dame Gertrude decided finally to make her profession will never be fully known; but as she had a good natural judgment, a most sensitive conscience, and a clear call from God, as I have repeatedly intimated, we may reasonably conjecture that she made both exteriorly and interiorly a deliberate and voluntary oblation of herself and profession, though perhaps with no great alacrity and with some sense of fear and misgiving.

I will here insert what one who was very intimate with Dame Gertrude has communicated to me. My informant writes: "Dame Gertrude told me, after she had entered into the spiritual course into which you,

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long after her profession, had put her, she could not be quiet in mind nor satisfied in conscience until our Right Rev. Father President who then was had given her leave to renew her vows privately to him. To this he yielded for her satisfaction; and so she did it, and that on account of a doubt, or fear at least, of the validity of her former profession."

Having been professed in the way we have described, Dame Gertrude very likely for a time made additional efforts to live more in accordance with her profession; but before long she found herself more than ever deeply plunged in her miseries, which even seemed increased by her profession. Besides, her natural virtues wonderfully decayed, and her heart, as she herself declares, became as hard as a stone as regards God and the exercise of virtue. Indeed, her life was as discontented as can well be conceived. Realizing her distressing state, Dame Gertrude set herself to find a remedy. But one thing, indeed, would restore her peace of mind, and that was to be put into the spiritual course which corresponded with her call from God. But as she despaired of this, having already tried and failed, she bethought herself of another remedy. She imagined that if she were removed to another house she would be happier, for then she would be rid of two difficulties—an aversion to her Superior, which still troubled her, and an excessive attachment to some of her Sisters. Here, indeed, was a plain temptation, for as likely as not she would meet with the same or similar difficulties elsewhere; but she had reached to such confusion of mind as to be unable to recognize the temptation.

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It happened just at this time that Dame Gertrude's beloved father, Mr. Crisacre More, arrived at Cambray, and was lodged by the nuns in the guest-house. Here he remained two or three months, once almost daily enjoying the company of his daughter, which afforded him the greatest pleasure in the world. Not to distress her father, Dame Gertrude put the best face she could on her life, and did her best to give satisfactory answers to his inquiries about her welfare. But at length, her interior trouble growing almost unbearable, she was strongly disposed to break her design to her father, and to seek his help to procure her transfer to another house, where she might live more contentedly than seemed possible here. Indeed, on one occasion she was on the point of broaching the subject to him, but at the last moment her heart, or rather God, would not allow her. For certainly, had she spoken, the great love which Mr. More bore her would have led him to make every effort to gratify her desire—and much he could have accomplished under the circumstances. Dame Gertrude, however, restrained herself, and nothing was said. Hence we may see the working of God's providence towards her, for by remaining here God enabled her, as we shall presently see, to obtain what she stood in need of, whereas if she had left, it would probably have been far otherwise.

This account receives confirmation from the friend I recently quoted. She wrote as follows: "Dame Gertrude did not at the grate, nor in any other ways, request her father for her removal out of this house. Nor did she ever speak one word to him of her interior grief and difficulty in that matter, which yet

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did so wonderfully affect her (as she hath sometimes told me) that since she often marvelled thereat, how she had withheld herself from doing it, or been able to conceal it from such a father, that was so tender of her, and to whom she could so freely have imparted the very secrets of her soul. But she said that surely it was not God's will she should do it. And it was He only that strengthened her in it. 'I was indeed very loath,' said she, 'and unwilling to speak anything that might be a grief to my father, and therefore I did always set the best face I could upon it, and said as much as I could that might be a comfort to him. And what I could not well speak of I did forbear, and would say nothing at all of it.' "

About the middle of August Mr. More left Cambray for Antwerp, where he remained for some time.

CHAPTER V

DAME GERTRUDE ENTERS ON AN INTERIOR LIFE

ABOUT the time of her profession—a little before or a little after : I am not sure which—Dame Gertrude came to me for some spiritual direction, which I gave her by word of mouth, according to my custom. She accepted the proffered advice, but at the time it produced no good effect, and this chiefly, I think, because she did not hit upon the right method of prayer, or, through ignorance, did not stick at it during the periods of interior darkness and desolation to which she was subject. All Dame Gertrude's spiritual good and reformation was to come by prayer. But being as yet none the better for the advice given, she held to her course both towards me and others, mocking and jesting in her gifted way at those who followed my instructions. Sometimes, however, noting that her Sisters were better or more at peace through these instructions, she would say to them : " Ah, it is well for you that you can get good from them, for I can get none."

Thus matters stood with Dame Gertrude till about the Feast of All Saints, about eleven months after her profession. Then she came to me a second time, and

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I again imparted to her directions which she asked for. This is the occasion to which reference has already been made, when she came on the advice of her Mistress.

Now, the difficulty which Dame Gertrude's director had to face was to find for her a suitable method of prayer. Vocal prayer was insufficient. Meditate or use immediate acts she could not—or, at least, to any good purpose. For though she could revolve images in her mind, and thereby discourse and draw inferences, yet this did not serve to move her will towards God, and enable her to break forth into acts of love. On the contrary, she remained as cold as if she had discoursed or preached to a stone. And this is the case with many good and well-disposed souls: so that what benefited Dame Gertrude may also prove salutary to others.

Dame Gertrude's case, as I conceive it, was this: God had given her—partly by nature and partly by grace—a wonderfully strong propensity in her rational will to seek after God and eternal felicity, and a disesteem or contempt for all the transitory things of this life. But this propensity, though so strong and efficacious, is in its own nature a very profound and spiritual thing, and cannot be more fully explained. Moreover, it is of such a nature that to be able to make use of it there is required a proper and suitable action on the part of the person; for of itself it does no good. So in Dame Gertrude there was this propensity to exercise herself by her own activity, if she could find a method that was suitable to her propensity and would afford her a relish. In her case the suitable method was not by any discourse of her imagination, nor by the use of

Beginning of an Interior Life

sensible images, but merely the exercise of affections, either as her propensity moved her to do by itself, or as she chose herself out of a book, or by custom, or from memory. For this purpose she selected out of the "Confessions" and "Meditations" of St. Augustine quite a store of affective actuations or aspirations which wonderfully suited her propensity. And by this means she came to have ordinarily a very efficacious prayer, accompanied by much recollection and internal sight of herself, through which she was enabled to discover her inordinate affections and other defects, and also to obtain through grace great strength of will for their amendment. Moreover, this method of prayer afforded her a good interior light, and, in conjunction with the propensity of her will, which was constant and much intensified by Divine grace, fully satisfied all the needs of her soul. Now at length she found that she had really entered on the right way for her, and that she had no further need but to hold fast by it.

Though Dame Gertrude was now in the right way, her path did not always run smooth. Frequently it fell out that none of her selected affective acts availed her, nor could she produce them with pleasure. She would fall into a certain dullness or coldness of will, which caused her some perplexity. My advice was that she should stick to her prayer, and not desist for any difficulty whatsoever. And she herself soon found by experience that even in those periods of dullness of will and desolation, by doing what she could she made spiritual progress, acquiring strength of will through the secret working of the Holy Ghost, and light to see her defects and how to amend them.

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In the beginning of her spiritual course Dame Gertrude was much subject to these desolations, and one day it happened that I was reading to her and another Sister from a Latin book called "*De Semitis Occultis Divini Amoris*,"¹ which I translated for them as I went along, and I came to the following passage about desolations: "There are some souls who are led by great aridity, indevotion, and without sensible perception of Divine correspondence, insomuch that they know not where to turn to find means to elevate themselves to God. In such times of spiritual poverty and aridity they cannot do better than rest contented and do the best they can. And let them comfort themselves with the Divine will, and accommodate their exercises so as to arrive at the true love of God." After I had read some further passages to the same effect, Dame Gertrude appeared to be deeply moved, and exclaimed: "Oh! oh! That must be my way! I pray you let me have that place translated into English." I gave her the passage in English, and she took it and made great use of the doctrine, continuing her prayer notwithstanding all her frequent desolations.

This spiritual reformation and the way it was brought about are thus described by Dame Gertrude in her writings: "Though of myself I had no mind to go to him [the Chaplain, Father Baker], yet upon my Mistress's bidding I went to him. Having done this, and received some general instructions about prayer and other things, and having put them in practice the best I could, within fifteen days after I found myself so quieted in soul that I wondered at myself, and found

¹ "The Secret Ways of Divine Love," by Barbanson.

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myself fitted as to instructions and satisfied. Those instructions were, for example, that I must give all to God, without any willing reservation of any inordinate affection to any creature. This I found my soul very willing to do. And next I must use mental prayer twice a day, which I found myself capable of. And though I found little of that which is called sensible devotion, yet I found that with a little industry I was able to use prayer with much profit. It also made any cross thing which happened very tolerable to me, and made me capable of understanding anything that was necessary for me in a spiritual life. Moreover, it discovered daily to me those things that were impediments between God and my soul, and made me abhor to do anything in the world for any other intention than out of regard of God, and because God would have me to do the thing. And I find that by and in the exercise of prayer God doth find such means to humble me, that all the creatures in the world could never have found them out for me. God also sends me such internal crosses, and withal shows me so plainly what I should do in them (if I mean to advance my soul by them, as He desireth I should) that it were but to obscure my soul to go and ask questions about them; and will I or nill I, I must bear them. And this I see: that God doth so temper everything that He layeth upon me, that it is just as much as and no more than I am able to bear, and is convenient for me. And methinks I see that anything I overcome is so wholly to be attributed to God that I cannot presume to be able to endure the least cross in the world, and should think it an extreme presumption to expose myself to

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hazard by wilfully putting myself of my own accord to the suffering of anything but what obedience and necessity do provide for me; and this I find to be enough."

In another place Dame Gertrude writes thus of her spiritual state and method at this time: "By exacting virtue and the practice of it above the grace and ability of a simple beginner, they make obedience and other virtues seem to be in practice an intolerable burden. Such disciples by such means faint even at the beginning of their way; whereas if they had been taught to do things with discretion, they would have been able to go on faster every day than the other. This one point is of such moment that for the want of the due practice thereof cometh many times, that the burdens of religion seem so heavy as they do, even to many good and well-meaning souls. In this point do most men differ from Father Baker in their directions of souls (so far as I could understand them) more than in any other point.

"If this course had not been held by him in an extraordinary manner, and that he daily for a long time encouraged me not to be daunted with my sins and imperfections, assuring me it would all turn to my good, if by prayer I would endeavour yet, with all possible patience with myself for my defects, to tend to God, and use the best means I could to reform myself in all inordinate affections to created things, and that more by quietness than by extraordinary force, I could never have prospered, nor held out in the said course, or in any other course that had been proper for me. But by the said way and means divers imperfections to

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which I was subject (and which I desired to reform, yet could not at first) decayed, and by little and little fell off, when God Almighty did (as I may say) see His time for it. This was a quite contrary course to that which was extolled by some of those whom before I had met with, who for the most part can give no other advice than to overcome all things by force and violence. But God did show me plainly in reading Father Baker's books that my way was to overcome myself as I could, and not as I would, but expect God's good pleasure. Then when He pleased, if I did my best, I should by His grace get the better hand of that which, with all my industry, I was not able to overcome. This showed me much my own frailty, and how little we are able to do of ourselves—yea, indeed, nothing that is good. For when I have been able to overcome myself in a thing many a time, yet when I thought myself thereby secure, that I was able to do it again, I have failed more than ever before. This maketh me never to dare to presume of my own strength in anything, how little soever; for if I do, I am sure to fail."

CHAPTER VI

THE NATURE OF DAME GERTRUDE'S PROPENSITY

THE propensity, or thirst for God, to which I have already alluded, is not imaginary, but is a very real spiritual thing, and causes in souls a kind of repugnance for discursive prayer, or any exercise in which sensible images are used to move the will towards God. This propensity leads the soul to seek God in an imageless manner in her own interior, and not in external deeds, nor by means of sensible images. Still, there are some souls with this propensity who are unable to seek God in this way through a secret defect in their internal senses, which prevents them from discerning aright the secret ways by which the Divine Spirit would guide them, so that they are more apt to take the wrong way than the right. They take the suggestions of their own imagination for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and cannot possibly continue in the right internal way very long. Nor can all the external guides in the world supply the deficiency. No such defect, however, had place in Dame Gertrude. Her internal senses were perfect and capable of distinguishing aright Divine admonitions from natural impulses, so that it was not I who brought her into the right

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way; I merely prepared and disposed her for it. What brought her into the way was her fidelity to my general instructions, her careful attention to the Divine light and impulse, and her constancy in the pursuit of prayer as best she could by one means or another. Indeed, her principal care as regards her internal way was to observe and follow the Divine light and impulses, so that the Divine Spirit was her real and principal Master in it. Moreover, the Holy Spirit not only caused and strengthened the propensity of her will, but also concurred with her patience, industry, and perseverance, so as to enlighten her in what to do and what not to do, how to amend her sins and defects, and how to avoid the occasions of them. The principal means, I think, by which the Holy Ghost enlightened her was by leading her to renounce all inordinate affections, so that by denuding her soul of the clouds of passion, whereby the natural reason is obscured, she was able to see much more clearly the light and help imparted by the Holy Ghost, to distinguish good from evil, to see her way in the spiritual life, and to correct her faults. Thus little by little Dame Gertrude began to amend her life not only interiorly, but also exteriorly, and in the sight of others. Indeed, so marked and sudden was the change for the better that, with the concurrence of a few others who were in the same way, a great improvement was to be seen in the convent, not only exteriorly, but interiorly too, in the case of many of the community. For though they were not all fit for these interior ways, yet the new tone made them look about them, and live better both interiorly and exteriorly.

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In truth, experience shows that three or four souls out of a community of thirty or forty religious women, fit for an interior life, and actually leading it, will be able by their sufferings and carriage to bring the whole community to at least a reasonable external observance and peace, especially if there be any good disposition or moral uprightness in them, as is generally to be found in professed religious. But this result is not produced by anything these interior souls do or intend, but is in virtue of the Divine Spirit working in them and sending His light out of them. And, on the other hand, when one of such natural talent, judgment, high spirit, and hardness of heart as was Dame Gertrude gets into a community, she will be a most pernicious influence there, and do untold harm to others. And as in such cases the decay in natural virtue and goodness and the growth of evil habits increase, there can be no doubt but that in a short time Dame Gertrude would have become a kind of pestilence in the house rather than a kind of foundress. And as what is best, when corrupted, becomes worst,¹ so Dame Gertrude, having received from God a nature and supernatural call to the best, through not corresponding with the call, was likely to decline to the worst. And had she not amended her life, but continued in her former course, it is highly probable, all things considered, that in time she would have broken her heart, and thus ended her days, her body not being strong enough to endure so great affliction; and God only knows what would have become of her soul!

I write with assurance on this point, having ground

¹ *Corruptio optimi est pessima.*

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for what I say by frequent allusions to the matter in conversation with Dame Gertrude after her conversion to God. And I think well to record her state as affording matter of edification, for in this we see the great mercy and goodness of God towards her; the mischief of not being in a true spiritual course in the religious state; the happiness of being in the right way, both on her own account and for the sake of others; and, finally, the narration will be to the honour of her own soul, which now, through grace, is enjoying celestial happiness.

If souls with the forementioned propensity to seek God interiorly would adhere to their prayer, and perform it in the best manner they can, they would undoubtedly make great progress. Especially should they observe the attractions or impulses of the Holy Spirit, what they can best do, what does them most good, or what they relish most. Moreover, perhaps at first they should begin with meditation or immediate acts, or let them, like Dame Gertrude, take affective actuations.

But for those whose propensity is to seek God exteriorly, I think they should use images by way of meditation, or immediate acts, or vocal prayer. For they will not be able to make a recollection by the use of affections, after the manner of Dame Gertrude. They may, indeed, be able to make ejaculations; but these, being brief and transitory, will never afford the interior light of a recollection. And if these souls cannot help themselves by such images, I know not how they can make any true mental prayer at all.

The frequent recurrence of interior darkness was the

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reason why Dame Gertrude so often speaks in her "Confessions" of serving and loving God *without comfort*, and of being content with the light of faith only, as being most secure and certain. This doubtless was her own practice.

Aided by her propensity and Divine grace, Dame Gertrude laboured diligently at her prayer. At first, by necessity, she made use of acts gathered out of books; but in a short time she came to use those only which suggested themselves to her mind, or were suggested by the Holy Spirit. These she often set down on paper to help herself with in time of aridity. And some of her Sisters, happening to light upon them, were so pleased with them that they copied them out. Thus, quite a store of these affective acts were scattered about the house in various books and papers. The greater portion of the second and third parts of the "Idiot's Devotions" consists of her sayings, the author merely having set them in order and arranged them in exercises.¹

Indeed, Dame Gertrude's love for the practice of recollection was such that through her it was better observed in the house than formerly, and a regulation was introduced into the Constitutions making mental prayer obligatory even on recreation days—an observance which is in force to this day.

The propensity which Dame Gertrude had to seek God interiorly is the way so much recommended by our Lord in the Gospel—to seek God "*in spirit and in truth*." But the propensity to seek and serve God by

¹ The book was so christened by Father Baker. Its principal title was "Holy Practices of a Divine Lover."

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the imagination and the use of images of creatures is the way referred to by St. Paul when he says: "*The invisible things of God come to be seen and understood by the things that have been created by Him*" (Rom. i. 20). But this way of seeking, finding, and adoring God is not so much in spirit and in truth as the way referred to by our Saviour, where God, who is a Spirit, is sought, found, and enjoyed by the spirit of man abstracted from the images of creatures.

The internal light which Dame Gertrude had in prayer, and by which she walked (as she often tells us in her writings), was, I believe, largely the result of clearing her natural reason from the clouds of passion, and thereby she was able to discern her defects and evil inclinations, and to know how to behave towards God and others. Such light probably is not of a supernatural character. But where the light of cleared natural reason is insufficient, as is often the case, then Almighty God adds in His own wonderful way a supernatural light. And this was the case, at least sometimes, with Dame Gertrude. For instance, she declares that her faith was strengthened and confirmed by certain lights which she received in prayer. Moreover, it would seem that she had very frequently a kind of perception or contemplation of the absoluteness of God and His being, and the total dependence of herself and all creatures on Him and His mere will. Indeed, these contemplations were the very ground of her humility and the reformation of her life. For in this knowledge and in living according to it consists true humility and obedience to God—a humility and obedience, as she tells us, that would make her subject herself to a worm, if

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God should so ordain. Often she would say that without this experience through converse with God and internal prayer, it is impossible to form a true conception of humility. Indeed, neither Dame Gertrude nor anyone else could acquire true humility, in which a real reformation of life consists, except by such spiritual knowledge and grace from God. Dame Gertrude, too, stood in particular need of such aid on account of her exceptional ability and judgment, of which she was perfectly conscious, though her carriage towards others was always beyond reproach. It was, moreover, remarkable, and observed by those acquainted with her, how much her natural reason improved, especially in matters that concerned herself, after she became interiorly enlightened by the spiritual course into which she had entered.

The true ground of humility is a knowledge of one's own nothingness and the totality and infinity of God. And no amount of study, nor conversation, nor instruction from others, however humble, would suffice to make Dame Gertrude humble, or enable her to know what true humility is. At first, through want of this knowledge, her natural gifts only increased her pride, wilfulness, and disobedience. But after she attained and daily enjoyed this contemplation in her recollections, and sought to live in accordance with that knowledge at other times, it was wonderful to see how humble she grew in her interior, though perhaps exteriorly there was not much to show for it in the absence of fitting occasions. The light and perception of God's infinity, and her total dependence upon Him, remained habitually in her, to the increase of grace in her soul, even to the

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hour of her death. So that all she did and all that happened to her contributed to her good and the increase of humility, as, for instance, desolations, or trials internal or external; whereas in her imperfect state these occurrences increased her pride, impatience, self-love, and other disorders of her soul.

To give a particular example: The Abbess, noting Dame Gertrude's spirit, thought it would be for her good to humble her by not taking much notice of her, as she seemed to expect. In consequence, Dame Gertrude conceived a dislike for the Abbess, and was most disobedient, and, in fact, headed a faction which was opposed to the Abbess. On the other hand, the Novice-Mistress, to whom Dame Gertrude was subject for about two years, hoping to benefit her, made much of her. But this also did harm, and increased Dame Gertrude's wilfulness and pride; so that her heart, as she says, became as hard as a stone as to God and spiritual things, whereas before she entered religion, though not perhaps devout, she was at least tender-hearted and docile, both interiorly towards God and exteriorly in her dealing with others. But it was wonderful to see how her understanding cleared and her will softened when she came to know God, herself, Superiors, and others, according to the order of justice and truth. She then saw what her will was of itself, and what it should be by right reason, and henceforth she strove to live according to the latter. Her amendment and that of others associated with her brought peace to the house, and relieved the Abbess of much vexation and difficulty.

The following Easter, a few months after Dame

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Gertrude had entered on her interior life, Mr. More arrived at Cambray to spend a few days with his daughter on his way from Antwerp to Paris. Being a man of intelligence, he soon discovered the change for the better in his daughter and in some others, and left well satisfied this time, which was not the case on his former visit. A similar favourable impression was made on his return from Paris the following Michaelmas. He then proceeded to Antwerp, where he passed the winter, and in the spring he returned to England, where he remained.

The propensity, or thirst of the soul for God, aided by grace, is, as we have seen, the root of the soul's internal seeking after God. But the propensity in itself is but a natural gift, and is often to be found in heathens, infidels, and heretics. But these persons, wanting the light of faith, grace of God, and those external instructions which are only to be had in the Catholic Church, are unable to make good use of their propensity, so that it serves not to render them happy and to satisfy their souls. But those Catholics who have it, aided by grace and external helps, may much more easily work with it and attain to interior happiness. Nor will their propensity ever forsake them, unless under the weight of sin, till their last breath. Thus, through the action of grace, this propensity becomes, as it were, the root and means of their spiritual rise, progress, and consummation, as was the case with Dame Gertrude.

Nevertheless, to do well by this way the person's temperament and internal senses must be naturally adapted for it. For instance, a person of a melancholy

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temperament or subject to violent passions will be very unfit for this way, even though he should be endowed with the above-mentioned propensity. But on the other hand, persons of a sanguine temperament, or of a merry and hearty disposition, or whose passions are quiet, are much better for this way, provided they have this propensity in sufficient force—a quality possessed by comparatively few, even of the best disposition. But those souls not so equipped by nature will have greater difficulty in treading this way. They will stand in need of more external help, and will be more liable to fall into error than the others. They must, therefore, proceed with great care.

The impulse of the will to elevate itself to God—a matter often referred to by spiritual writers—is nothing else than a natural propensity. And when the person is in a state of grace, and voluntarily exercises the propensity, the Divine Spirit doubtless adds greater vigour to the elevation of the will towards God. Dame Gertrude was endowed with all the requisite conditions for success. She inherited from her father a sanguine temperament, and a merry, bright nature. She had a propensity to an interior life in a high degree. Her internal senses also were well adapted for the work, and she was well provided with instructions how to discover and exercise herself interiorly. By these means she came to receive the internal guidance of the Holy Ghost, which she carefully observed and corresponded with in the light of faith, and an abundance of grace which alone renders the soul pleasing to God. Besides, she was in a religious Order and an enclosed convent, where she found every external help,

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Superiors having arranged the hours and all other matters in the manner best calculated to assist souls in the acquisition and exercise of contemplation, as the nature of the Order required. She had also the encouragement of example and the concurrence of other souls in the house who were walking in the same way of the spirit—a help of considerable moment. Moreover, she had ability and sufficient health to enable her to seek God interiorly, till she entered on her last sickness; and even then God is wont to supply such well-disposed souls what their failing strength cannot give, till the moment of death. It is not surprising, then, that a soul so well provided as was Dame Gertrude should stand in no need of external help. Indeed, the interference of man in the affairs of her soul would only have caused her trouble and confusion, except in so far as he could administer grace by the Sacraments, for which she ever entertained an ardent desire. Her mind otherwise desired to forget men and all other creatures, and attend to the one thing which she justly deemed to be all in all, and in Whom she consummated her spiritual course, passing immediately into another of greater stability, security, and perpetuity, in which she enjoyed an essential and real contemplation and fruition of what before she had seen only as in a looking-glass, and by a parable, and in hope. But I am digressing. To return.

As the above-mentioned perception and knowledge of God was the cause of humility in Dame Gertrude, so humility was the cause of her obedience to God and to others, where it was due for His sake. This is the obedience of which she often speaks in her writings.

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If she had not attained to this kind of obedience, which is the root of all true obedience, she would never have been able to obey either God or man in a way that would have brought peace and contentment to her soul, but, on the contrary, she would have increased in pride and disobedience. It was this that made Dame Gertrude cry out in her "Confessions," and lament that all other poor souls in religion are not fully instructed in this kind of obedience, and brought to pursue it: for if they were, says she, they would be as docile as lambs towards their Superiors, and all others according to reason; whereas, for want of this knowledge, many are stiff-necked and rebellious, as she confesses herself to have been, till she attained to this knowledge.

This divine obedience of Dame Gertrude consisted in this—that for God and out of love and obedience to Him, she willingly and readily did those things to which she was bound in any way, refrained from those things she was forbidden, and patiently and with resignation, and even cheerfully, endured all difficulties and sufferings which befell her, whether in internal matters, as contradictions of will or desolations, or in external things, as unkindness or neglect of others, or bodily infirmities, which were often considerable. In a word, her standpoint towards God made her regard all the things of this life, and all that could be done or suffered in it, as mere nothing, save in so far as they could help or hinder the love and service of God and the attainment of eternal happiness, on which was concentrated all her ambition and desire. It was only during her recollections that she enjoyed that perception of God which is possible in our imperfect state; and then she

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would, as it were, annihilate herself before Him, in which act, strictly speaking, humility consists. But at other times she tried to live, as far as her frailty would permit, in accordance with that perception of God's totality and her nothingness.

Oh, what a happy gift have they who are endowed with this noble, natural propensity, if they will but daily work upon it, for it helps or even impels them to seek God interiorly! But they must be animated by supernatural grace, and those other necessary qualifications which I have already mentioned. How easily may such souls work, and continue to work, even till the very last breath of their life. For even their very nature, corrupt as it is, concurs almost impetuously with Divine grace, and carries them along as in the current of a stream towards God. But those who are without this propensity must laboriously toil against the stream of nature. Hence it may be easily understood that such souls have more difficulty in following this way, and still more in persevering therein to the end. But the former happy souls have a propensity to seek God inherent in their very nature—a propensity which will never leave them as long as life shall remain in their bodies.

CHAPTER VII

DAME GERTRUDE'S TENACITY TO HER INTERIOR COURSE JUSTIFIED

By what has been said, it may be seen how insufficient were all human instructions for Dame Gertrude, except in so far as they helped to bring her to that perception of God of which I have spoken, and to lead her to attend to the Divine inspirations and admonitions, by which a reformation was brought about in her soul and life. What madness, then, would it not be for anyone to withdraw her from this way of life, and to put her into another fashioned by human ingenuity and skill! A way such as this might be suitable for one incapable of anything better, but not for Dame Gertrude. Surely no one, no Superior or Director, would withdraw her unless in ignorance of the course she was pursuing.

Though the propensity to seek God was in part a natural gift in Dame Gertrude, it does not usually attain its full perfection at once, but ripens with years. In some souls it ripens quicker than in others. In Dame Gertrude it probably did not attain to any great maturity or perfection while she was in England; or if it were so, the propensity was overwhelmed and smothered by the warm affection she entertained for

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her friends and kindred. Moreover, children are usually more taken up with pastimes and amusements than with the things of the life to come. As St. Paul says of himself, "*When I was a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child,*"¹ etc. Nevertheless, it cannot be doubted that the propensity was in Dame Gertrude, but it could not assert itself or attain to any perfection till she came to years of greater maturity, and the external impediments of the society of kindred and friends were removed by her departure to France.

When we remember the timid disposition of Dame Gertrude, the delicacy of women, and the nature she had received from God—a nature so well affected towards Him and His service; and still more, when we consider her contemplation or perception of the infinity, omnipotence, and justice of God, and her total dependence on Him Who could in an instant annihilate her, and cast her headlong both body and soul into hell (and this in time He would indeed have done if she had persisted in her pride and disobedience); and still more, when we bear in mind how her perception and knowledge of God ever became fuller and clearer in her frequent recollections—were not these things sufficient to render her humble and obedient to God in all things, and to others for His sake, according to His will? They were indeed, and, through the grace of God, it proved to be so. By natural disposition, it is true, Dame Gertrude was little inclined to subject herself to anyone, except, perhaps, to her parents, according to the bidding of nature. In consequence, her life in religion was anything but pleasant, and in all probability

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 11.

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she would have come to a miserable end, had she not been brought by those means to reform her life, and to persevere in the face of opposition, or the persuasion of others. It is not surprising, then, that having once found this way, which consists principally in observing and following the Divine inspirations, she should be most averse to relinquishing it for any other, believing all other ways to be insufficient for her needs.

Indeed, it appears to me to be a great pity that novices and young religious are not sufficiently instructed—as far as human instruction will avail—in the properties and attributes of the Majesty of God. That their principal end in entering religion is to subject themselves to His Divine Majesty, according to reason and justice; and that God at any time is able, for their disobedience and ingratitude to Him, to annihilate them, and cast them into the depths of hell, there to endure for all eternity torments so horrible that the wit of man cannot so much as conceive them, much less express them in words or in writing. And this lesson should often be inculcated to beginners in ample terms, and with much insistence, so that they may be inspired with a reverential fear of God and a due submission to His substitutes on earth. I am sure such instruction would be most profitable to capable souls, and would help them, till they arrive at an experimental knowledge and perception of God like that of Dame Gertrude. And this infused knowledge will be found to surpass, beyond all comparison, that which is obtained by the teaching or preaching of men. Still, this latter will be of great use to the soul, till she attains to that other more potent and efficacious knowledge.

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In the following verses Dame Gertrude assigns her conversion to God to a period after she entered the convent :

“ And that my wicked heart did prove,
Who after sins so many,
Hath found such favour in Thy eyes,
Without deserving any.
Oh, blessed ever be my God,
For His preventing grace,
Which I, unworthy, have received
In this most happy place !”

Could anyone, then, blame Dame Gertrude if she adhered to a way which she found so profitable to her soul, and declined to abandon it at the suggestion or threats of any private individual? Undoubtedly she was prepared to submit herself wholly to authority, after due examination of her case by competent persons appointed by the Congregation. Of this she protests in many places in her writings. But without such inquiry, she had no reason to alter her course, and relinquish practices which were evidently so fruitful of good. Upon these terms she acted, and acted wisely, and with a conscience undisturbed during life or at the hour of death.

When God calls a soul to the religious life, especially in a Contemplative Order, His intention is to perfect her by the Divine guidance and inspirations, to which she should attend and be obedient. For this purpose the religious life is very suitable and even necessary. For external discipline was ordained by St. Benedict and Superiors, partly to enable souls the better to observe the interior Divine impulses, which should be the principle and foundation of their internal

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and external acts ; partly that souls may have the help of Superiors to dispose themselves by general instructions how to observe and distinguish the Divine impulses ; and finally, that Superiors may decide in cases of doubt the source of the inspiration, and distinguish the inspirations of the Holy Ghost from natural and diabolical suggestions. For this end the Church sanctions religious vows, and the soul in making them should have a similar intention. A Superior, therefore, who should utterly neglect and despise inspirations, and regard them as rubbish, will act contrary to the Divine will, the intention of Holy Church, and the religious state. His principal care should be rather to promote and facilitate such inspirations than to hinder them. Hence St. Benedict in his Rule will not allow the Abbot to dispose as he lists even external things over which he is in a measure lord and master,¹ but he must in all things follow the Rule as his guide.² But the Rule, though good and holy, is but the institution of man. If, then, it is unlawful for the Superior to deviate from the Rule, how much more unlawful must it be to exercise authority or command over the inspirations and impulses of the Divine Spirit in the soul ! If, then, any Superior should be so rash (which God forbid should ever be the case in our Congregation) as not to give heed to Divine inspirations, but shall manifestly disregard them, and impose upon a soul his own ideas instead, surely the soul in such a case will not be bound to obey—at least, in the case where the command is given without examination or inquiry as to the nature and source of the inspirations. In such a

¹ Chap. lxiii.

² Chap. lxiv.

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case the soul may well observe that command of Holy Scripture, that it behoveth to obey God rather than man. And let the soul continue to observe and follow the Divine light and impulses, making use of such means as may be lawful, and as God shall provide for the peaceful pursuit of her way.¹

That such a situation as this might arise is certainly quite possible. For the Superior might be a man, whose spiritual course lay in the exercises of the imagination, as is the case with the majority of souls in these days, and not in the exercises which, strictly speaking, are truly spiritual, and which are founded upon the light and impulses of the intellective and not of the sensitive soul, which operates principally through the imagination. And the latter is of little or no use in the exercises that are truly spiritual. St. John of the Cross, in his treatise "The Living Flame," reprehends at great length and very vehemently Superiors who hinder or discourage souls from observing and following the

¹ This passage, to be rightly understood, should be read in conjunction with what Father Baker says on p. 201: "Such assurance . . . could not have been possible if she had not been fully resolved to stand by the judgment and decision of her Superiors as regards both interior and exterior matters. It is true a soul might feel great reluctance, etc. Still, the obedience due to God and His substitutes . . . can move a soul . . . to true obedience above all." Cf. also "Sancta Sophia" (the First Treatise, chap. ix., secs. 5 to 8): "Whatsoever internal suggestions, motions, or impulses we may find that shall be contrary or prejudicial to such external call to obedience and regularity . . . we ought to despise and reject, judging them to be no better than diabolical illusions. Yea, this is to hold, although the said external laws, commands, or observances be such as we, in our private judgment, cannot think to be very proper or convenient for us in particular," etc.

D. Gertrude's Tenacity Justified

Divine impulses, and oblige them to walk by human ways and methods. If a Superior distrusts or suspects the inspirations of a soul, it is his duty to inquire into her ways and interior course, and not to condemn her or divert her from her course without any knowledge of her interior life.

Is it not reasonable that a soul pursuing such an interior course should set down in writing what she can find for her defence, in case her way be impugned? This, at least, is what Dame Gertrude did. She had suffered enough from human methods, and from want of knowledge of true spirituality, and hence in her writings she often gives expression to her fears, and the danger of being diverted from her course, well knowing that as she was in a way that suited her spiritual needs—a way that had been hard to find and hard to enter, and that was not trod by the many—she was likely to meet with more opponents than supporters. Hence Dame Gertrude was wary in exposing to others her interior life unnecessarily, lest through indiscretion she should impair or lose so precious a gift, by which she satisfied both God and her own soul, and was clearly, as she could see, under God's special guidance. But let this suffice for the present. I shall have to return to this subject later.

CHAPTER VIII

VOCAL PRAYER

IT is now time to express more clearly and fully the nature of Dame Gertrude's prayer after what she termed her conversion, when she began to lead an interior life.

To do this it will be necessary to explain at some length the different kinds of prayer that spiritual disciples usually begin with for the attainment of contemplation, the perfection of prayer. There are four ways by which souls may begin, according to their aptitude, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or the advice of their director. Usually souls begin with an inferior degree, and afterwards ascend to a higher, till they are ripe for contemplation.

The first way is vocal prayer. This prayer is suitable for simple, unlearned persons, who are not apt for discursive prayer, or have not learnt how to exercise it. This is often the case with women, lay brothers, and others in a secular state of life.

The second way of praying is suitable for those who are unable to raise affections towards God by discourse, but are drawn wholly to the immediate exercise of the will. This arises often from the propensity which God

Vocal Prayer

has given to their will naturally, and causes a certain repugnance for reasoning or consideration in prayer. They are already too well disposed towards God to stand in need of arguments and reasoning to raise affections towards Him.

Vocal prayer may be profitable also for the learned, who are able to make use of discourse, and thereby to produce affections towards God. Still, they should not rest content with vocal prayer, but should often, according to their need or profit, have recourse to discursive prayer, in which the understanding is exercised by means of the imagination, in order to raise affections towards God. It is true, in ancient times all souls began their spiritual course with vocal prayer, whether they were capable of discursive prayer or not. This is evident from the fact that vocal prayer alone is spoken of by the ancients, till the soul arrived at contemplation. The prayer of the ancients was principally the Psalter, which they repeated daily, and sometimes oftener. This prayer served them till they attained to contemplation, which consisted of a pure internal prayer Divinely inspired, or a capability which in time formed a habit of contemplation. When actually unable to contemplate, they resumed their vocal prayer. But their vocal prayer was now performed in a more spiritual manner, with spiritual attention, and with little or no use of the imagination, which was not the case before they attained to contemplation. When they were beginners they required the use of grosser sensible images, which are now gone or transcended, and God is apprehended much more spiritually.

But the ancients had other great helps, which

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rendered their vocal prayer very efficacious. They enjoyed perfect solitude, silence, and abstraction. They withdrew from the world and all worldly intercourse. They liberated themselves from the solitudes of the world, and applied themselves to painful mortifications, as fasting, abstinence from flesh-meat, short and broken sleep, bare and humble lodging, coarse and scanty clothing, extremes of heat and cold, besides many other mortifications undertaken by Divine inspiration, or imposed by Superiors or necessity. Besides these external hardships, there was their continual, serious application (a matter of great moment) to the exercise of interior virtue, such as obedience, humility, charity, and patience, as may be seen in the lives of the ancients.

What wonder, then, that any kind of prayer, were it only vocal, should suffice for them? But this we must ever bear in mind—that they were never attached to any kind of prayer, whether vocal or otherwise, but were always ready to leave their exercise for another at the inspiration or guidance of the Holy Spirit, Whose office is to draw souls in their exercises ever more and more towards Himself, and to cause the exercises to become more and more spiritual. Nor is it matter for surprise that the ancients attained speedily to contemplation and perfection. And if we in these days could and would act as they did, we should also attain to the same degree of perfection.

By these means the ancients—at least, such as had an aptitude for it—passed straight from vocal prayer to contemplation. But in these days even souls that have a strong propensity and call from God, through want

Vocal Prayer

of correspondence with grace, or infirmity, or other cause, are unable to accompany their vocal prayer with all those helps that were used by the ancients, so that the effect of their prayer is proportionately weaker. We require far more indulgence in meat and drink, recreations, interruptions in our attention to God, so that vocal prayer alone will not suffice for us, as it did for the ancients. We must, therefore, make good the deficiency in another way—by exercises that are purely mental, by which the soul may become recollected, and exercise herself towards God, at least at fixed times. Thus we make amends for the distractions in which we live during the rest of the day, till we attain to that perfection which will enable us at all times, even when engaged with external employments, to uplift ourselves to God.

Such, at least, was the case with Dame Gertrude. No number of vocal prayers that she could recite were able to produce recollection in her, or afford her a true knowledge of God and herself. For though she had, on the one hand, a strong propensity to God in the depth or fund of her soul, on the other hand her natural activity drew her strongly to outward things, so that all day long—at least till she made considerable progress in the habit of recollection—she was immersed in business, conversations, and other external employments; and they really did her no harm, but rather good, for her nature required an outlet. But when she betook herself to her recollection—and she was most careful never to miss it—her strong propensity or call to God asserted itself, and she would presently become wholly recollected, and converse with God, all sensible

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images and the affairs that had occupied her attention being wholly and easily banished.

However, it cannot be denied that for those whom vocal prayer, accompanied by some exercise of virtue (for without the latter no kind of prayer will be efficacious), is sufficient to bring to contemplation, no way is easier or more secure; none less injurious to head and health, or less exposed to delusions. And in time, in the case of a capable soul, the prayer becomes aspirative, mystic, and contemplative. So was it with Dame Gertrude. In time she came to recite the Divine Office with great recollection, interior light and sweetness, as she testifies in her "Confessions." These are her words: "The Divine Office is such a heavenly thing, that in it we find whatsoever we can desire. For sometimes we address ourselves to Thee for help and pardon for our sins, and sometimes Thou speakest to us; so that it pierceth and woundeth (with desire of Thee) the very bottom of our souls. And sometimes Thou teachest a soul to understand more in it of the knowledge of Thee and of herself than ever could by any teaching in the world have been shown to a soul in five hundred years, and Thy words are works."¹

Certain, however, it is that few souls attain to contemplation, or spiritual prayer, without the help of some other purely mental prayer, seriously and industriously pursued. But let this suffice for vocal prayer.

¹ Dame Gertrude had some knowledge of Latin—at least, enough to follow the Breviary, as she acknowledges elsewhere, though in her modesty she attributes her knowledge to a good memory.

CHAPTER IX

MEDITATION

ANOTHER kind of prayer for beginners is discursive prayer, or meditation. This method of prayer is very good for those that need it and can perform it. Some souls need it not, because they are able to exercise the will immediately without discourse, especially after they have used meditation for some time. These are souls that have the propensity of the will, to which I have referred. They are either wholly unable, as in the case of Dame Gertrude, to raise affections by discourse, or if they are able, the ability to do so does not last long. They become utterly unfit and unable to use discursive prayer, and are ripe for the immediate exercise of the will—an exercise consisting of immediate acts or ejaculations, natural or forced, as was the case with Dame Gertrude at first. These souls do not employ much force or labour on the reasoning portion of their exercise, nor do they dwell long on it; but presently, on the apprehension of the point by the imagination, they fall to the use of the will, to which the greater part of the exercise is devoted. Thus, these souls are able to do immediately by the will, aided by their propensity (and even more effectually), what others without the

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said propensity can accomplish only by discourse. These latter souls, I believe, find it very difficult to persevere in the exercise of discursive prayer, nor can they become truly spiritual. For the exercise itself is painful and laborious; the senses, too, are often indisposed, and other impediments occur, which render the exercise most difficult, and at times almost impossible. Moreover, however diligent these souls may be, they will never get beyond the use and limitations of the imagination; nor will they ever exercise an internal prayer, because they lack the natural propensity. And the reason the propensity makes so great difference is because it proceeds from within, and tends towards the interior. Consequently, those souls who are without this gift cannot become truly spiritual, either in their lives or in their exercises. These must always be active, and consist in the use of the internal and external senses, and not in the spirit which is abstracted from the use of the senses.

For this kind of prayer (discursive prayer) Dame Gertrude found herself wholly unfitted—probably because her strong propensity towards God gave her a kind of disgust for reasoning and consideration, as unnecessary and wearisome. Indeed, the inherent power of the propensity is so great that almost of itself, or with very little help, it can easily and readily exercise itself towards God.

Speaking generally, women, whether they have this propensity or not, are less able to meditate than men—partly because women's wills are more powerful by nature than their understanding, and partly through want of education and training, by which the ability to

Meditation

meditate is acquired. As to those who lack the propensity, I scarcely know how they can hold themselves to the daily pursuit of mental prayer, especially to discursive prayer, which in time is apt to become dry and painful; and yet I do not see what other form of mental prayer can be recommended, or is likely to prove more satisfactory.

CHAPTER X

THE PRAYER OF IMMEDIATE ACTS

THE third kind of prayer suitable for beginners is the exercise of immediate acts—immediate, because the soul occupies herself directly with God, without the assistance of discourse or reasoning. The exercise is performed chiefly by the superior will, but not without some use of the imagination and understanding: for in making the act, the understanding must use the sensible image of the thing in which the act consists. Still, there is no formal discourse or reasoning; there is merely the apprehension of the matter by the understanding, and the main part of the work is done by the will, which produces an efficacious act towards God. Indeed, owing to her propensity towards the interior, such a soul can make a more efficacious act towards God than another with ever so much reasoning, if she be without the propensity. And not only is the act more efficacious, but it is produced with much less labour and industry, so that the exercise is less likely to prove injurious to mind or body.

It is this propensity to the interior that enables such souls to prosper so well without meditation, the propensity, wholly or in part, replacing discourse, and

The Prayer of Immediate Acts

causing a repugnance for seeking motives to love God, when the soul is already so well disposed to love Him. Still, I will not say that those who have the propensity never use meditation, for some do and some do not ; but they that use it will not tarry long in it, but after a few years, or even days sometimes, will pass on to immediate acts. Occasionally, however, these souls may be driven temporarily to resume meditation ; still, the use of the understanding even then will be slight, as the working of the will will predominate.

The acts may consist of any good matter which can be referred to God or His love and service, such as matter for resignation, patience, obedience, humility, sorrow for sins and purpose of amendment, or of avoiding the occasions of them, or the exercise of charity. Such matter the soul forms into an act, intending to do the thing, or suffer it for God. There are other acts which refer to God immediately, without reference to the soul herself, as when she congratulates God on being what He is, and wishes or wills that all should love Him and serve Him, and other such acts of goodwill and benevolence towards God. These acts are called immediate acts, and differ from true contemplation, because some pressure is applied to the will to produce them, and there is required some choice in the matter, some industry, besides a considerable use of the imagination. But true contemplation, or the habit of contemplation, consists of the aspiration or elevation of the spirit abstracted from the imagination and senses, the elevation deriving its force and vigour partly from the propensity of the soul and partly from the action of the Holy Ghost, Who dwells more intimately and

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perfectly in the propensity; so that the Holy Ghost may be said to be the mainspring or principal worker in the elevation of the soul to God.

As to Dame Gertrude, she was quite incapable, as we have seen, of meditation; nor was she better disposed for immediate acts—neither the one nor the other was the least use to her. Nor was she more capable of using the acts which have immediate reference to God. The reason of this, I believe, was that all these exercises involve a considerable use of the imagination and the revolving of images; whereas her spirit, disposition, and call from God wholly tended towards an immediate affection to God, so that she had a kind of disgust for the use of all sensible images and of the imagination, as I shall show presently when speaking of the fourth kind of prayer suitable for beginners.

CHAPTER XI

THE PRAYER OF SENSIBLE AFFECTIONS

THE fourth kind of prayer, which suits beginners sometimes, is the prayer of sensible affections—*sensible*, because the prayer is exercised chiefly in the emotions and senses; *affection*, as distinguished from the understanding, working by the imagination and sensible images.

Now, there are some dispositions that are naturally more affectionate than others towards God and rational creatures; and if they have either of the two propensities to seek God, interiorly or exteriorly, they can easily exercise their sensible affections towards Him, and without seeking reasons for it. Indeed, they feel a kind of loathing for seeking reasons, as they are already well disposed to love God. Nevertheless, at first they scarcely know how to exercise or employ their sensible affection on God, through the very abundance of it. Many of them are incapable of meditation or immediate acts, as these require the use of images, and at least some discourse. And the souls that have such an abundance of affection must exercise it in some way or other. And though they have the habit of affection, they often do not know how to use it, either through want of experience or because they are not just at the

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moment in the humour for it. For such affectionate dispositions are very subject to sudden changes of feeling—sometimes brought about by an internal cause, as some slight indisposition, or by an external cause, as change in the weather, or a trifling discomfort or annoyance. At such times these souls fall into great aridity, obscurity, and distress, and they are unable to help themselves with meditation.

This was often the case with Dame Gertrude, and for the above-mentioned reason. And her remedy, which was a good one and may be recommended to others, was this: She gathered out of books examples for the exercise of sensible affections, and she made other acts of the same kind, as suggested themselves to her; for example: "O my God, when shall I love Thee as Thou deservest to be loved?" "O that I were free from myself, that I might love Thee!" "When shall I be united to Thee?" "When shall I love Thee with all my heart and soul?" The acts which suggested themselves to her were the most profitable, but in default of these she made use of what she could get out of books, which seemed suitable to her spirit and inclination. This exercise, however, was still in her sensitive nature; the acts were affective acts, and not the aspirations of the spirit. But the exercise of the sensible affections was the preparation she made, and was an absolutely necessary preparation before she could attain to the exercises that are truly and purely spiritual.¹

¹ This point is of such importance that I think a full note should here be appended. The propensity to the interior, to which reference has often been made, is insufficient by itself to unite the

The Prayer of Sensible Affections

During the periods of aridity and depression, when nature refuses to help or concur in the exercise, the soul should adhere to her exercise of affections, even

soul to God, but it must be exercised and worked upon. The reason that it cannot be used easily and fully at first is on account of the adhesion of the images of creatures to the soul, caused by inordinate affections for them. And when by suitable exercises these affections and their objects are expelled from the soul, the propensity, aided by grace, begins to make itself felt, and freely and powerfully draws the soul to God, as may be seen in contemplation. The way to work upon and strengthen the interior propensity is by expelling the sensible images of external objects by other good images, also sensible. So that the beginning of an internal reformation of life is brought about by sensible exercises, which are stepping-stones to enable the soul to attain to the exercises of the spirit in which true contemplation consists.

When the bad images are expelled, and are replaced by good ones, these latter will not hinder the working of the spirit, but will gradually yield and give place to it ; otherwise the spirit will be unable to work. For the spirit, in order to work, must have all sensible images, both good and bad, removed. Hence, the beginner in a spiritual course commences with the use of good sensible images, and it is impossible to begin a spiritual course with the exercises of the spirit. Thus, St. Paul says: "*Not that which is spiritual comes first, but that which is sensible ; afterwards that which is spiritual.*" So also says St. Bernard: "*Miraculous is the contemplation which is not founded upon precedent meditation.*" And by meditation he means any good exercise in which sensible images are used. Hence the four ways of praying suitable for beginners here given are all founded upon the principal use of sensible images. Those souls who have not a propensity to the interior must abide always in the exercises in which sensible images are used, and these souls will find the exercises very profitable to themselves and to others, and pleasing to God. And this is the way of the active life. But others who have the propensity to the interior do not always remain in the

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though they are produced without pleasure or light, unless she can see how to do better. And God will accept her goodwill, and will promote her spiritual welfare in the way He sees best.

This was precisely Dame Gertrude's case. Hers was one of those affectionate dispositions which suffer from frequent aridity, obscurity, and indisposition for prayer. But she never desisted from doing what she could, and she strove to be patient and resigned in what she could not do. She was careful, also, to observe her times of recollection, and to do as well as nature and grace would enable her. By acting thus, she gained as much (if not more) in times of darkness and indisposition as in the time of light and sensible devotion; for she never failed to obtain light and knowledge how to act, and the will and grace to do the right

exercises of the senses, but after a time these will give place to the exercises of the spirit, which are independent of the senses and the imagination, and consist simply in the elevation of the will of the intellective soul to God. These are sometimes called *senseless* aspirations, because they are far removed from the sensitive faculties, and have no sensible meaning. These aspirations proceed from a habit of good affections established in the intellective soul by the aid of the preceding sensible exercises, and the habit in a measure restores to the propensity that power and tendency towards God which it possessed in the state of innocence, when no inordinate images hindered or troubled the soul in her operations towards God. And though the elevation of the will is an action far removed from sense and sensible things, it is far from being meaningless. The soul elevates her will towards God, apprehended by the understanding as a spirit, and not as an imaginary thing, the human spirit in this way aspiring to a union with the Divine Spirit.—FATHER BAKER.

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thing—and what more could be desired? Other souls, too, in similar difficulties would prosper equally well if they would be as diligent and persevering as was Dame Gertrude, and would be as attentive to God's guidance and call as she was, holding this to be "all in all."

The exercise of sensible affections differs much, according to the soul's propensity. Those souls whose propensity is to the interior enjoy a very clear light, and are able to produce very efficacious acts; and though their exercise is still in their sensible nature, it is at least in the nobler part of it, and tending towards the spirit. In consequence, they enjoy much internal light, and can see their interior and its state with much clearness. The same may be said when they practise meditation and immediate acts.

But those souls, on the other hand, who have a propensity to seek God exteriorly are much more deeply plunged into their sensible nature when they exercise sensible affections, and they enjoy less internal light; nor do they as frequently as the former experience the Divine impulses and guidance. The reason the former hold themselves more aloof from their sensible nature is on account of their interior propensity, which ever draws them more and more towards the spirit, in the exercises of which is the consummation of the interior life. Moreover, it is the aptitude and propensity towards the spirit that lead these souls to regard external, sensible, imaginary things as unessential in a spiritual life. Nor are they so prone to indiscretion in the exercise of their sensible affections, by excess of tears, or other emotions, to the

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injury of head and health. Nor will they allow any other impediments to crop up in the way of the spirit, their interior light ever serving them as a guide to teach them discretion in the interest of the spirit. But those whose propensity is to the exterior have less internal or spiritual light, and must needs help themselves the more by natural reason. And when God favours them with sensible devotion in any fullness, they must be careful not to indulge in it to excess, though forgetfulness in this matter will be less hurtful to them than it would be to souls of an interior propensity.

In the prayer of sensible affections Dame Gertrude persisted, till her intellective soul became ripe and capable of producing habitually spiritual aspirations, which constitute true contemplation. In these she continued with an ever-increasing spirituality till the hour of her death. The increase of spirituality consists in a greater abstraction and elevation of the soul out of her sensible nature and its desires. I will not here speak of the passive unions which followed after Dame Gertrude attained to a habit of abstraction from her sensible nature, but I shall have something to say about them later, derived from her writings, and from other sources of information.

These, then, were the means by which Dame Gertrude attained to contemplation. But still, the other three ways of prayer are as good for those souls for whom they are suitable. The souls that pursue vocal prayer must at first make great use of the senses and sensible images, and in course of time the prayer, if accompanied by mortification, will become aspirative, spiritual, and

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contemplative. The same must be said if the soul approaches contemplation by way of immediate acts or meditation. But in the latter case the soul seldom steps straight into contemplation (especially if she proceeds by the best way), but usually she passes through a course of immediate acts as an intermediate step, and continues in them till she is ripe for contemplation. When the soul has attained to contemplation, it makes not the least difference as to which of the four paths she has travelled by—all ways meet in contemplation, and contemplation is alike for all, the only difference being that some souls rise higher out of their sensible nature than others, according to their measure of grace, their diligence in prayer, and the perfection with which they have borne the mortifications which came to them directly from God or from creatures. The rapidity with which the soul attains to contemplation also depends largely on the strength of her natural propensity.

In Dame Gertrude's case the natural propensity was exceedingly strong, and this not only enabled her to pray diligently and efficaciously, but also to bear the many heavy crosses and mortifications which befell her, and of which she makes mention in her "Confessions." Besides, Dame Gertrude was of a quiet nature, and her passions were not so strong but that she could keep them well in hand, and prevent them from breaking forth into external inordinate behaviour. But souls with less quiet passions will take longer to attain to contemplation.

Now, it may be asked, How did Dame Gertrude perform her exercise of sensible affections? Did she

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use the affections vocally or only mentally? I cannot determine with absolute certainty how she made them, but I am inclined to think that usually the affections were made mentally, without pronouncing the words vocally. This at least we may be certain of—that she observed and followed the Divine impulse and guidance in this matter, as in all other things. It is also practically certain that she followed no precise order in the exercise, but just took what seemed to be most in accordance with her immediate disposition, or to what she felt drawn, and seemed likely to promote her affection towards God. In conclusion, she performed the exercise as well as she could, and hoped that it would be acceptable to God, for that was all she desired; and there she left it, without attempting any kind of examination to see how she had performed her recollection.

Though I have said that only the fourth sort of prayer for beginners suited Dame Gertrude, yet it frequently happens that souls make use of two or three, or even all four ways, according to their needs. No rule can be laid down to limit a soul to one or other particular way of prayer. But the soul must watch closely herself, and her call from God, what suits her best, and to what she is most drawn; she must also seriously pursue prayer one way or another, and then she will not fail to see how she should behave therein. Such is the way that Dame Gertrude proceeded, and with most happy results, for all the spiritual men in the world could never have taught her the special method of prayer that would suit her. All that I did was to advise her, urge her, to perform her mental

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prayer one way or another, and never to desist either for aridity, or obscurity, or any difficulty whatsoever; and that as none of the three former methods of prayer appeared to suit her, she should try the fourth in the manner that experience would show to be best for her. And I firmly believe that the reason why so many intelligent souls in religion, or in God's Church, fail to advance in spirit is because they do not take that course; but, either through the fault of the director or of the souls themselves, they pursue one particular method which they have read in a book, or which has been pressed upon them by their director, without regard to its suitability to the individual soul. And this was the miserable plight of Dame Gertrude till she lighted upon the way that was proper for her, and this she found by observing herself, and noting what profited her most, and what were the attractions God gave her by nature and by grace.

Indeed, the office of director is not to teach a particular method to the disciple, but to give general instructions by which the soul may get into her interior, and when she has once got there, to observe the Divine admonitions and guidance, instead of following the methods of books, or opinions of others, custom, or what at other times had proved profitable. This point is of such moment for God's honour and the good of souls that I think a better deed could not be done than to proclaim this doctrine all through God's Church by the pen of some spiritual man who can express himself clearly and skilfully. And this fault lies not only in the soul adhering too pertinaciously to one of these four methods of prayer, but also

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in her not leaving all four when the fitting time arrives for her to enter upon contemplation.

These observations, however, apply only to souls that have a propensity to the interior, perfect internal senses, and sufficient judgment, by which they may distinguish the Divine impulses, and what is good and what better for their souls. And many such souls are to be found—both men and women. When once they have been equipped with general instructions, there will be little occasion for the director to busy himself about them, except in the case of some special need, and at the request of the souls themselves. This will be a great relief to the director, and is certainly best for the souls themselves; for they will then yield themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Who is the proper Master of the spiritual life.

CHAPTER XII

DAME GERTRUDE'S EXERCISE OF MORTIFICATION: PRAYER AND MORTIFICATION COMPARED

PRAYER, however, is not the only matter of importance in the spiritual life. There is another thing of almost equal consequence, and this is mortification. The spiritual life consists of these two things—prayer and mortification, the one being insufficient without the other. The director, therefore, and the soul herself must be as attentive to the matter of mortification as to prayer, for mistakes in this are often the cause of many impediments in the way of contemplation. A common fault, for example, is this: that the soul neglects to follow God's call and guidance in matters that are indifferent, to which she is not bound one way or the other, but follows instead the common practice, or what she has seen recommended in books, or was advised by others, or what she has hitherto done. None of these courses should be followed by a contemplative soul, but she should consider whether the thing does her good or harm, and what God would have her to do in the matter.

This was the principle Dame Gertrude embraced and carefully followed as regards mortification. She

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cared not how strange or different her practice was from the common teaching of men and books, provided, of course, that her conduct was not unlawful or likely to cause scandal. By following this course and the manner of prayer that has been described, Dame Gertrude attained to happiness of soul, though her life exteriorly showed little indications of mortification. Nevertheless, taking together her internal and external practices, her life was really one of considerable mortification. Yet who could have guessed it from her exterior, since she was to all appearance wholly taken up with external things, as will be seen later? Still, there was nothing unlawful or likely to cause scandal in her carriage, unless perchance on some rare occasion through frailty or ignorance. And what mortal creature is not liable to such occasional lapses?

My instructions to Dame Gertrude on the subject of mortification may be embraced under three heads. First, that she should do all that belonged to her to do by any law, human or Divine. In this was comprised obedience to Divine inspirations not only in matters of obligation, but also in things that were indifferent; for Divine inspirations are to be observed by spiritual persons as a law of prime importance. Secondly, that she was to refrain from those things that were forbidden her by human or Divine law, or by Divine inspirations. Thirdly, that she should bear with as much patience and resignation as possible all crosses and contradictions to her natural will, which were inflicted by the hand of God. Such, for instance, were aridities, temptations, afflictions or bodily pain, sickness, and infirmity; or, again, loss of honour or esteem, unkind-

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ness, neglect ; or, again, the loss of friends or want of necessities or comforts. All this was to be endured patiently, whether the crosses came directly from God or by means of His creatures. These, indeed, were mortifications enough for Dame Gertrude, or for any other soul, and there was no need for anyone to advise or impose others. Being thus left free to follow the Divine call in matters that were not obligatory, Dame Gertrude had ease and liberty enough for soul and body, and yet not one jot more, all things considered, than she needed for the good of her soul. Indeed, had not this course been instilled into her and faithfully observed, she would never have made progress in a spiritual life, however well instructed she might be as regards her manner of prayer. And this truth applies with equal force to all other souls, for not only do they go astray by pursuing unsuitable methods of prayer, but they are only too often hindered by mistaken notions on mortification.

This, then, was all I recommended to Dame Gertrude with regard to mortification—that she was to do, or forbear, or suffer, according to her obligations or necessities. And as for indifferent things, matters in which she was left free by Superiors, she should act according to her call or immediate inspiration from God, or (which is all one) what she found most suitable and profitable to her spirit. Into fuller details I did not enter, but left Dame Gertrude to apply these principles to her needs, advising her only to observe the Divine guidance, and to act as she saw would promote her progress in spirit. If this method of dealing with her had not answered, I believe nothing would,

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when we consider her good and bad qualities. However, as she had a good natural judgment and a strong propensity to an internal life—most necessary qualities—she prospered exceedingly well. And like success would attend other souls that are apt for contemplation, if Superiors and Directors would lead them in this way. But through not being directed thus in indifferent matters (among which the manner of prayer holds a foremost place), many souls become oppressed in spirit by the unsuitable things they have taken upon themselves, or which they do in an improper manner. Hence their spirits get choked, obscured, and hindered, so that they cannot find or tread the way of the spirit. Indeed, the way of the spirit is a secret, mystic way, and is not to be discovered save by a Divine internal light, obtained by means of prayer, and pursued with a corresponding degree of mortification; and this light is hindered and obscured by the rash assumption of things that should not have been undertaken, or should have been performed in a different manner. The cause of all this trouble is that the soul neglected to pay due attention to the Divine call, and was led by passion, or by natural judgment and will. And thus what otherwise might have been a help turns out to be a hindrance to spiritual progress.

Though the spiritual life consists of prayer and mortification, and neither is sufficient without the other, still prayer is the nobler and more necessary of the two, because it is the end of mortification, and is sought for itself. Mortification is required that we may pray well, and in prayer consists our happiness in this life, just as the happiness of the life to come consists

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in the prayer proper to that life. Mortification enables us to pray well by combating and destroying self-will,¹ the only impediment to perfect prayer and actual union with God. And it is just by doing, or abstaining, or suffering according to God's will and for His sake, that we overcome and kill self-will. For we do or suffer things that are either repugnant to our will and natural inclination, and so clearly destroy self-will, or we do things that are agreeable, but not because they are agreeable, but in order to conform our will to the will of God. Thus, by observing the three heads of mortification given above, we shall remove the impediment of self-will. Mortification, however, is not prayer, for prayer is union of the soul with God ; but mortification is often an effect of union, and is a disposition for its attainment.

Prayer, however, has further merits and superiority over mortification :

The first and principal merit is that in prayer the soul attains to the essential happiness of this life, which is union with God in her three powers.

The second is that by prayer, or conversation with God, Who is Light and the Fountain of light, the soul is illuminated by a supernatural light or discretion, by which she discovers how to discharge faithfully and in

¹ We have no word in English that exactly conveys what is here meant. The idea is something more than what is generally understood by self-will. It means the possession of one's own will, the sense of being the owner, master, proprietor of it, with the power and right of disposing of it as one likes. This is what has to be combated and destroyed, and God be made the Owner, Master, Disposer of the will and life of the soul in everything.

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the best manner her obligations, and how to hold herself with regard to matters of indifference. In the latter, the light teaches her whether to do them or abstain from them, how far to pursue them, in what manner and to what end, and all in relation to God, His honour, and His will.

A third merit of prayer is that it gives grace and strength of will to perform those mortifications which correct our corrupt inclinations; for without grace and strength the soul remains weak, unwilling, and unable to perform these necessary mortifications.

A fourth merit is that the mere exercise of prayer is one of the greatest mortifications, and is most destructive of self-will. For by prayer the soul is lifted to a great extent out of herself, and out of the ordinary condition of her nature. She exercises resignation, aspirations, upliftings of the will towards God, and other spiritual acts; and, finally, she enters into a supernatural condition, which in a measure deifies her will and makes it totally and perfectly one with God.

These considerations will enable us to understand better why Dame Gertrude extols so loudly the merits and necessity of prayer, and presses it so earnestly upon others, having experienced in herself its wonderful efficacy. Nor should we wonder at her frequently dwelling on the value and necessity of Divine light and guidance, and the obligation of observing and obeying it, if the soul is to be led in the supernatural way of the spirit. By means of prayer, Dame Gertrude received a great measure of light, by which she learnt all that was necessary to enable her to distinguish what was of obligation from what was not. And as to indifferent

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matters, the light taught her how to use them as helps, or avoid them as impediments in her way. Thus she discovered that many things to which she yielded were not impediments at all, but were natural to her temperament and necessary for her. And she indulged in these things, not out of natural delight in them, but in obedience to God and His will as manifested to her by her interior light in time of prayer. Nor was she deterred by the fact that these things seemed contrary to the ordinary teaching of spiritual books, or the example of holy souls, or apparently contrary even to reason and the opinion of others. But rather did she follow her interior light and Divine guidance in these indifferent matters, although it might happen that occasionally, through frailty, she would incur some blemishes and imperfections. These, however, would speedily be wiped away by God at her next recollection, because the faults were not committed with affection or deliberation, but out of frailty and inadvertence. Nor was she bound to avoid the occasions of them, but, on the contrary, they were, as we may say, enjoined on her by the Divine light and will.

CHAPTER XIII

DAME GERTRUDE'S CONDUCT AS REGARDS RECREATIONS, CONVERSATIONS, ETC.

BUT perhaps the reader is curious to know in detail what were those uses of Dame Gertrude which were contrary to the common teaching and practice. In some respects, I think, it is not fitting that you should know. For souls of weak judgment might foolishly be scandalized, or, in consequence of Dame Gertrude's example, would adopt her practices, to the great detriment of their souls. Her call from God to these practices was peculiar to herself, and none can imitate her with profit, unless they have a similar call from God. And just as no one ever was or ever will be of exactly her disposition, temper of mind, and combination of qualities, so neither will anyone else be called to follow precisely the same course on all points, or even in some of greater moment. On the other hand, for souls of discretion and judgment who will follow only their own call from God, and not that of others, the knowledge of her practice may be very helpful. For they will see that souls may be called by God to do things which appear strange in the eyes of persons incapable of these interior ways, and the external action

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corresponding with them. In such cases, therefore, souls should obey their call from God, though it should appear strange to others, even as Dame Gertrude did.

With this preliminary warning, and for the sake of the latter, I will venture to state some of Dame Gertrude's practices that I can recall. Dame Gertrude was naturally of an active turn of mind. She loved to occupy her thoughts with novelties, anything that was strange and curious, or with clever and striking sayings. Such a disposition made her impatient or incapable of much solitude, silence, or abstraction. In fact, it drew her in a contrary direction, so that when she attempted in her early days to practise silence and abstraction, she was at once assailed by a thousand disturbing thoughts, tending to inspire her with fear. Hence, all solitude was detestable to her, and she delighted to be in company with others, talking and listening to news or any strange thing that might happen. The topics of conversation were not evil in themselves, nor were they injurious to her, because they preserved her from greater harm in other ways, though doubtless she incurred many imperfections, and her natural habits were strengthened. Still, being a religious and having a good will towards God, she spent much of the appointed hours of solitude in spiritual reading, or on the works of philosophers, or on secular writers of good taste. She was particularly delighted with historical works, and was more attracted to verse than prose. Indeed, when but a child of four or five she used to make rhymes in conversation with her father, to his great entertainment, for he was delighted to see her so merry. Silvester's translation of the French writer Du Bartas

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particularly pleased her, the manner and matter of the work being good. The translator or author, unhappily, was not as orthodox as he might be; still, Dame Gertrude was so sound in this respect that she was able to use what was good in the work without taking harm. But novelty held such charms for her that she could find no pleasure in reading a book a second time. In this way she read all through the writings of St. Gertrude, and whatever she could lay her hands on; and she was very quick to hear of anything that was worth reading. But trivial, silly books, which held nothing solid, and of "no good qualities," pleased her not. Reading was her chief consolation in the early days of her religious life, especially during those seasons set apart by the regulations of the house for solitude and silence. At other times she would always be in company, either at the grate or in the house, thus for the time banishing from her mind discontent and other pernicious thoughts. In a word, her whole tendency seemed to be to outward things, and no kind of disposition for an interior life was apparent. For there is no greater enemy to such a life than a disposition and turn of mind such as I have described.

To bring such a disposition as this into an interior life was possible only to a strong interior propensity in the will and perfect internal senses, by which the understanding is able to distinguish the light and impulses of the Holy Spirit. No other method of direction was possible for Dame Gertrude, but to give her the general instructions already enumerated, by which she might get into her interior, and there observe and obey the Divine light and admonitions. By their means she

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discovered what did her good and what harm, what her obligations were, what she should refrain from, what and how she should suffer, and what she should do in the use of indifferent things. God gave her the light of discretion for all these things; so that the Divine Spirit was really her Master and Reformer, giving grace to her propensity and light to her understanding for her guidance in the right way.

If, therefore, a director of Dame Gertrude had followed his own experiences or the methods of books, he would have hindered the action of the Holy Ghost, and she would never have come to any good. But the Holy Spirit, as it appeared to both Dame Gertrude and myself, proceeded with her, as with all others, not violently, or in a way that would oppress and crush both body and soul, but sweetly, graciously, leading the soul on little by little, and, as it were, extorting from her the abandonment of deliberate inordinate desires. And as for the reform of evil habits, the Holy Spirit is content to wait, hoping to amend them little by little, provided the faults are committed without affection for them or their occasions. In like manner does the Holy Spirit act with regard to indifferent matters. He does not at first demand perfection, but is content if the soul perform such acts with the least degree of perfection, provided only that she does them at His call and bidding. For He has regard to the weakness of her propensity: the small measure of grace He imparts to it; and He fears, perhaps, to hurt her by a too sudden or violent reformation of her sensible nature. Examples of indifferent matter are external pursuits and occupations, conversations in the

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house or at the grate, correspondence, the spreading or hearing of news—things neither meritorious nor sinful in themselves, but often the occasion of imperfections, like most things a man can do. Of a similar character are secular books which are not written for spiritual profit, though the matter in itself may be perfectly harmless. To abstain from the use of such things is in itself more perfect, but they may be, and actually were in the case of Dame Gertrude, a necessary diversion and relaxation of mind, which enable the soul to perform her recollection with greater freshness and intensity. Still, these things must not be done out of deliberate affection, but only as necessary and in obedience to God.

Thus did the Holy Spirit seek to amend little by little what was defective or unlawful in Dame Gertrude; and He permitted her to continue the use of indifferent things which were natural to her temperament, or which had become habitual by custom, but still with some diminution in their use, or at least of affection for them.

These remarks find support in various passages in the writings of Dame Gertrude. Thus, in her "Confessions" she says: "I desire no consolation but that I may in solitude and silence, all the days of my life, be able to live without all consolation, human or Divine; no recreation by conversation, or other businesses or employments, but so far as is necessary to bear up my spirit to attend unto Thee more seriously at convenient times. Rather let all necessary distractions, by help of Thy grace, serve as a mere cessation, rather than by the least affection to them, or

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comfort in them, they should become an impediment to my aspiring after Thee." Again, a little farther, she says of herself: "Who am not able, without much and often diverting my mind to indifferent things, to attend to Thee in my soul at other fitting times, and this by reason of my great weakness of body and head. Let all this imperfection in me humble me, and let it be no impediment to my truly loving, serving, praising Thee, and adhering only to Thee, which is my only desire by all I do or omit."

From these and similar passages it may be seen that, if Dame Gertrude did not mortify herself in indifferent things, it was not out of affection for them, but out of discretion; because she judged that by such recreations she would be able to perform her recollections more satisfactorily. Moreover, she perceived that the Holy Ghost not only did not reprehend her, but, on the contrary, encouraged her in the practice, until His grace and guidance enabled her to use indifferent things with greater perfection. And it was impossible that God would leave a soul of such excellent dispositions, and pursuing such profound and clear recollections for years, without correcting what was amiss. I fully concurred in her course, and believed that she acted in accordance with God's will.

Indeed, no man, however spiritual, can of himself guide the soul aright in indifferent matters. Nor is God wont to illuminate him fully for this purpose. The light is more commonly given to the soul herself, though sometimes the light directs her in a particular doubt to turn to an external guide, and then oftentimes a special light is bestowed upon him that he may give

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her proper counsel. But as the soul made application to him by a Divine illumination, so she takes the advice and uses it by the same light. So that even if the director be not illuminated, the light and disposition of the disciple will enable him to turn the advice to his good, as well as if the director had received a special light from God for the solution of the difficulty. Thus, the Divine Spirit is ever the immediate and principal guide to the soul. Nor could any external guide, by his experience and natural reason, have directed Dame Gertrude, or any other contemplative, in the right use of external indifferent things—still less such as are internal; and there are no fewer of the latter than the former.

The reason of the superiority of the internal Guide—the Holy Ghost—over the external guide is that the Holy Ghost is omniscient. He fully penetrates and understands all that is in body and soul, both natural and acquired. He also knows how much supernatural grace He means to impart, without which there is no spiritual progress. He therefore knows what is most proper for the soul in all things. But the external guide can scarcely be certain on any point of importance. He can only conjecture, and may easily be deceived. The ability of the one and the insufficiency of the other are expressed by these words of Sacred Scripture: "*Man seeth only those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart and the interior.*"¹ A man sees what is external in another, as his countenance, colour, stature, and other visible qualities; but these

¹ "Homo videt ea quæ parent, Dominus autem intuetur cor" (1 Kings xvi. 7).

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are not to the purpose. Of the internal qualities and senses the external master can have no certain or sufficient knowledge. Nor can he obtain it from the disciple, as his knowledge, too, is utterly insufficient for the purpose; so that the disciple cannot guide himself. Nor is anyone else sufficient. The Holy Ghost alone, by virtue of His omniscience and omnipotence, has the requisite knowledge of the disciple's qualities of body and soul. Besides, the internal Master not only can and does move the intellective soul immediately to contemplation without the aid of discourse, but He also illuminates the understanding by supernatural light, which is necessary to enable the soul to distinguish purely spiritual ways. And neither of these things can be done by any external master, or, indeed, by any ther mortal creature.

From what has been said, it will be easily understood how unfit for Dame Gertrude were the usual instructions found in books for the guidance of souls about indifferent matters; yet the right use of them belongs to the very essence of the spiritual life. Suppose, for instance, her director had told her to make meditation, or use immediate acts or vocal prayer: none of these would have suited her. Or if she had been able to use them for a time, she would have to be taught when she ought to abandon them for contemplation. But no creature could teach her this in particular; she must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and observe His light and attractions. Or, again, if a director had told her to keep her mind actually attentive to God while engaged in external employments, as far as they would permit, and never to suffer any thoughts to enter her

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mind or abide there which had not reference to God, but always to keep her mind intent on Him, or on the humanity of our Saviour, it would only have hindered her progress. Then for her exterior, if he had told her that she should ever be in solitude, save when obedience required otherwise; that she should always observe silence, except when spoken to, or when some necessary business required her to speak, and not one word further; that she should always keep her eyes modestly cast down, and observe nothing but what obedience required; that she should refrain from conversing at the grate or in the house except at the call of obedience, and then converse on spiritual subjects as far as possible; that she should not listen willingly to news, though harmless in itself, for fear of distractions; that she should withdraw as much as possible from offices and employments that might cause solicitude, lest they might disturb and distract her mind; that from the very beginning of her spiritual course she should aspire to total abstraction and recollection of life—in a word, if she had been told that she should lead the life of an angel on earth and make violent efforts for a speedy reformation of her nature, without taking any heed of her natural inclinations, it would certainly have been destructive to both her mind and body. Yet these and similar instructions are to be found in books and in the writings of even the holiest men. But in the case of Dame Gertrude, how inapt would have been such instructions! They would in no way have promoted her spiritual progress. Indeed, she would not, and could not, have put them in practice. If she had attempted it, she most certainly would have gone out of her wits

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or utterly ruined her health, and confounded and obscured her soul by it. And though no director, perhaps, would have been so imprudent as to have given her these instructions precisely as I have specified them, still, no man was capable of showing her how far, or to what extent, she should observe them to promote her spiritual progress, and at the same time without unduly taxing mind or body. The Divine Spirit alone could impart that knowledge immediately to the soul herself in her recollections; and He will refer the soul to an external director in the case only of some particular doubt, for which He has not bestowed sufficient light.

The only serious fault, indeed, which Dame Gertrude had to find with her former directors was that they had prescribed some or all of these bookish, human instructions concerning mortification and prayer (to which they may all be reduced), without referring her for their particular application to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER XIV

DAME GERTRUDE'S CONDUCT IN MATTERS, WHETHER OBLIGATORY OR INDIFFERENT

LET us now turn to the details, as far as we can, of the Divine conduct in the life of Dame Gertrude. These may be grouped under two heads: (1) Matters that were purely internal; and (2) matters that were internal and also external. By purely internal matters I mean thoughts and other merely internal occupations of the soul, exclusive of prayer; for of this I speak elsewhere. Internal occupations may be either obligatory or indifferent—obligatory, as when the soul is obliged to exercise a virtue interiorly, by resisting a temptation or conforming her will and judgment to an external thing, and the like; indifferent, when we employ our mind upon a matter that is neither sinful nor virtuous in itself—all thoughts, for example, about creatures or created things that are used or entertained for recreation. In this there is nothing unlawful or meritorious. Such thoughts are indifferent in themselves, but the intention of the person may make them meritorious or demeritorious. If he entertain them as a necessary recreation for his spirit, or for the honour of God, or the good of his soul, they are not only not

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vain thoughts, but are actually meritorious. But, on the other hand, if he entertain them for a bad purpose or end, they become sinful and defective, the bad intention turning them to evil.¹

As to external matters, these also may be obligatory or indifferent. Obligatory matters have been sufficiently explained. Examples of indifferent matters are the occupation of time, keeping company with others, talking, writing letters, or anything else; conversation at the grate or in the house, any kind of exercise or employment, with all the solitudes connected with it, and the like. All these external things are in themselves indifferent; but the intention, actual or habitual, of the person performing them may make them meritorious or the reverse, profitable or unprofitable, to his spirit.

And now what was the manner in which the Holy Spirit guided Dame Gertrude in all these things, whether indifferent or of obligation? As for things of obligation, we must know that the Holy Spirit would never inspire His disciple to do or omit anything contrary to them. Whatever Dame Gertrude did that was opposed to her obligations must be attributed solely to her natural will and judgment, to ignorance and frailty; and who in this life is not subject to such falls? But after her conversion her faults were never committed out of affection or a perverse will, for her desire to please God in all things was very strong and firm.

¹ Cassian speaks much about indifferent things which he calls *media*. He divides all things into *bona*, *media*, and *mala*, according as they are used, *media* (or indifferent things) becoming *mala* (evil) if used ill, and *bona* (good) if used well.

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Then, as to indifferent things, both internal and external. These the Holy Spirit permitted, and even encouraged, Dame Gertrude to use, though opposed to true introversion, on account of her temperament and her strong inclination to them; but withal He ever taught her to purify her intention about them. For had the Holy Spirit denied her such external pursuits, He would naturally have destroyed her health, which was already none too strong. A person of more robust constitution could have borne more violent mortifications; but Dame Gertrude must be taken as God made her. As time went on, the Holy Spirit gave her the grace not only to perform indifferent actions with a purer intention, but also to contract fewer blemishes. And at the time of recollection all faults were amended by virtue of her strong propensity and Divine grace. The Holy Spirit also taught her how to use indifferent things, so as not to impede, but rather to promote, her future recollection. So that, while attending most of the day to external things, she was able to come to her recollection, and perform it so easily and so clearly that scarcely a distracting image would trouble her or hinder an immediate converse with God. Hence these external occupations proved to be a necessary food for her soul. The Holy Spirit, indeed, dealt with Dame Gertrude as with all souls. He accommodates His grace to their natural disposition, in so far as it is not evil, but ever seeks to reform little by little what in it is a hindrance to profound introversion and perfection. He does not change the natural character, but restrains, subdues the inordinate movements of natural passions and desires.

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These results of God's action were apparent in Dame Gertrude. For by virtue of her recollections and profound introversions, her passions, and internal senses in course of time, and, indeed, a good space before her last illness, became much quieter, if not wholly deprived of all excessive exuberance. Thus she became capable of solitude, both internal and external, and could endure to be without external pursuits and cares beyond what were imposed by necessity. Conversation after meals was all that she found requisite for her health and spirit. Accordingly, out of discretion rather than affection, she kept up such relaxations; for now (I am speaking of her latter years) she was become wholly God's, and desired and sought Him only, as is evident from her "Confessions" made to God and in His sight. The excessive activity of her internal senses died away, and became, as it were, numbed by her profound introversions. By this means, I think, was accomplished what some writers describe as the drawing in of the external senses into the internal, and the internal into the fund or depth of the soul, though I am not quite sure that I understand what these writers mean to convey.

In course of time Dame Gertrude was also able to perform her external occupations with less adhesion and without pouring herself out so much as formerly. This, as appears from her "Confessions," was the result of certain contemplations during her recollections by which she perceived the vanity, the nothingness, of all creatures in themselves; and her affections at the same time were strongly drawn into God, and were left, as we may say, firmly fixed upon Him.

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But that Dame Gertrude's natural attitude towards external things may be better understood, I must remind you that before she entered on her life of recollection, her head and senses were often more busily employed than they should have been; and even after she had entered upon her spiritual course, outside the set times of recollection she was scarcely less active. All the business that the house could afford for all its members was hardly enough to satisfy the activity of her mind, though happily her bodily strength was not of the same proportions. But as far as the activity of her mind went, it was as though she had the "solicitude of all things"¹ on her shoulders. There was nothing concerning the house of any importance, great or little, but she had her head or hand, or both, in it, but more the former. None conversed more at the grate than she did, for her own or others' recreation. None was more given to asking or hearing news about things outside; but for things within there was no need to ask, for none knew more than she. None wrote more letters, and with greater ease. She willingly took upon herself the duties of Cellarer and the charge of the Sisters, the latter affording her more solicitude than had all the rest of the house together, unless we except the Abbess, whom also Dame Gertrude assisted daily and almost hourly, as occasions arose. All this she did with a good intention, though distracted thereby for the time. Thus, all her actions about external things were done for God and referred to Him—if not actually, at least virtually, through her previous recollection and obedience to the Divine will.

¹ The solicitude of all the Churches (2 Cor. xi. 28).



BLESSED SIR THOMAS MORE.

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Indeed, Dame Gertrude saw that these occasions of distraction were as necessary for her bodily health and spirit as was her daily meat and drink ; though in time, as I have said, the activity of her internal senses and passions quieted down, so that she occupied herself less with external things, save when necessary ; and she became more capable of solitude, both external and internal. When, however, she arrived at this stage she did not venture, as heretofore, to read spiritual books in the afternoon immediately before the hour of recollection—partly because she did not now need or relish instructions, as she had abundant light within for her guidance ; and partly because such reading put too much strain upon her for that time, and might have seriously hindered the efficacy of her recollection. In consequence, she usually read at that time, as the weakness of her head would allow her, some useful, though not spiritual, book, as Tacitus, Du Bartus, and the like. Still, she was able to draw some lessons or make extracts even from those that were of profit for the advancement of her soul. And in her recollections she clearly saw that the Holy Spirit approved of her conduct ; so she continued her practice as being in accordance with the Divine will and call, and necessary for her health of mind and body. Thus she applied her reading to the honour of God, and avoided as far as she could all sin in it.

But alas ! who, if not well acquainted with her interior, and experienced in the ways of God, could have supposed from Dame Gertrude's carriage that she was pursuing a spiritual course, or in any way apt for an internal life ? Or who but the Holy Spirit Himself

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could have guided her and brought her through these external pursuits into an interior life? And how strange and widely diverse are the ways and the guidance of the Holy Ghost in souls! Hence, in the use of indifferent things, no soul should be judged or condemned by others—above all, not a soul that in any way seeks after God. Because, for aught we know, that soul may be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Who may be directing her in all these things to her final good.

Our Holy Father St. Benedict gives some wise admonitions to the Abbot which are very applicable in the case of Dame Gertrude. Our Holy Father warns the Abbot to take heed not to break the vessel through excessive and indiscreet attempts to remove the rust. St. Benedict, therefore, condemns too much violence and haste, but would have the rust removed by gentle rubbing, little by little, lest the vessel be injured. Such was the course taken by the Divine Spirit with regard to Dame Gertrude, and which the external director had to pursue; nor could the latter form a different judgment grounded upon appearances and her external carriage.

Moreover, our Holy Father goes on to say that the Abbot is prudently to correct and cut off the vices to which souls may be subject, as he sees may be expedient for each one.¹ And this the Abbot does by learning and noting the internal call from God of each one, accommodating his commands thereunto. St. Benedict also holds out the example of Jacob: “*If I cause my flocks to be overdriven, they will all perish in one*

¹ “Rule of St. Benedict,” chap. lxiv.

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day ' (Gen. xxxiii. 13). Taking, then such testimonies as are borne by these and the like words, to discretion—the mother of virtues—let the Abbot so temper all things that the strong may have somewhat to strive after, and the weak nothing at which to take alarm."

This great discretion was also necessary on the part of the external director for the guidance of Dame Gertrude, or, indeed, for the guidance of any other spiritual soul—a discretion which consists chiefly in observing and accommodating himself and his instructions to the guidance of the eternal and true Master of contemplation, the Divine Spirit. And though I know Dame Gertrude attributed in her writings very much to me, yet my share in the matter was really slight. All that I did was to give general instructions on prayer and mortification, which was quickly and easily done. The difficulty and labour lay with Dame Gertrude, who with diligence strengthened her propensity by corresponding with Divine grace, and following the light and attractions of the Divine Spirit.

Indeed, every director should have as little to do as I had in dealing with souls capable of contemplation. He should have small difficulty and much comfort in them, leaving them principally to their own industry; and their labour should be much lightened, if not sweetened, by their propensity. I know a person of a stronger constitution than Dame Gertrude would have been capable of more violent and speedy reformation; but then, her delicate frame had to be considered, which was as weak as could be, without being actually in consumption or ill, though oftentimes she did fall ill. Besides, that she was a woman had to be taken into

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account. Women are less capable of violence than men. But the Divine Spirit alone is that wisdom which "*strongly reacheth from end to end, and disposeth all things sweetly*" (Wis. viii.). All others, the soul herself, however wise and learned, and all external directors, are powerless to find or teach the way to contemplation. The path can be found and trod only by the aid of an internal light, which is imparted by the Divine Spirit, and His chief direction consists in teaching the soul how to use indifferent things in the manner that will for her be most conducive to contemplation. As for matters of obligation, the Holy Spirit requires their exact observance, but as they are palpable the soul can need no instruction about them, unless in the case of some special difficulty.

Indeed, the only reason Dame Gertrude adhered to me more than to some others was, as she says in her "Confessions," because I directed her to observe and follow the Divine call as her principal or only means of perfection. And this she saw to be the only proper way for her, for she had tried all others, and found them unsuitable and insufficient. Some other directors she discovered to be either ignorant of this method of direction or not very well disposed towards it; in fact, more inclined to deride than commend it. This was a source of great mortification to her—a mortification which caused her to make more progress in spirit than almost anything else that could have happened to her in the world. I shall have to return to this later. Meanwhile, we may note and praise the gracious providence of God in providing her with a mortification which pierced to the very centre of her soul, and

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served as an excellent preparation for a resigned and happy end. Indeed, no creatures, neither men nor angels, could have devised such a suitable, salutary, and purifying mortification for her soul. Nor was this a transitory affliction : it was constantly with her, and lasted nearly the whole of the last two years of her life. She had also another very purifying interior cross, which was also habitual and very profitable, but was not so weighty as the other. This was a temptation to repeat her former confessions, contrary to the advice of her Superiors. She makes mention of this in her "Confessions." But the other being far greater, I shall speak of it more fully hereafter.

Dame Gertrude often complains in her writings of the indiscretion of Superiors and directors. They are apt to take too much upon themselves, and imprudently urge souls to the exercise of perfection without due regard to their qualities, temperament, spirit, and talents, natural and supernatural. They should leave more to the Holy Spirit, Who alone can fully weigh all these things. Thus they mar and hinder all perfection in the soul by demanding it unreasonably, or more of it than she has yet attained. Of this Dame Gertrude speaks feelingly, having had experience in her own case, as well as in that of some of her Sisters, with whom she was on familiar and intimate terms.

CHAPTER XV

CERTAIN PRACTICES WHICH TOOK THE PLACE OF FREQUENT EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

To turn now to another matter, in which the practice of Dame Gertrude differed from that taught in many books, and pursued by many modern Congregations whose state is active rather than contemplative. I refer to the subject of examination of conscience. It may well happen that active Orders pursue a different course here from those who exercise contemplation. Active orders usually inculcate the necessity of express, direct examination of conscience at certain fixed times during the day. But this teaching was not accepted or followed by Dame Gertrude and her Sisters. Their examination was made indirectly, virtually, in a way more in keeping with their state, and much more beneficial for their souls. This was brought about by a combination of four or five general practices.

The first was to have a continual care of themselves, both interiorly and exteriorly, not scrupulously or anxiously, but prudently and sweetly, observing the counsel of our holy Father—"to keep guard at all times over the actions of one's life." This can be done with comparative ease in a Contemplative Order, where

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the occupations are not very distracting; and more especially in our convents for women, where every facility is given for such continual vigilance over themselves, and where very distracting business, which is the usual cause of serious lapses, is excluded.

This, then, is one thing that renders an express examination less necessary, as it tends to take away the cause and matter of examination. For we all see that it is better by watchfulness to avoid falling into a fault than to give occasion for search by the neglect of such care. Moreover, the faults into which spiritual souls fall are commonly too spiritual and secret to be discovered by the senses and imagination; for it is by these that the examination is made. But spiritual defects are best cured by spiritual means—by the elevation of the spirit to God. By such means the soul is cleansed from all spiritual defect incurred, and which, on account of their secrecy and subtlety, she never could have discovered or corrected by her senses. Thus such faults are amended, as far as they can be amended, even before they are known. Further, our holy Rule and Order tend towards solitude, both interior and exterior, discouraging external activity as much as may be, so that we may not only avoid the occasions of sin, but also be able the better *vacare Deo et Divinis*—be at leisure to attend to God and Divine things.

For these reasons our holy Father prescribes no express examination of conscience in his Rule, but his teaching tends to cut off the occasions of sin by means of solitude, and the custody of the soul herself over her actions. Hence our Holy Father in the first degree of

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humility says that the disciple should "always keep the fear of God before his eyes, avoiding all forgetfulness. . . . And keeping himself at all times from sin and vice, whether of the thoughts, the tongue, the hands, the feet, or his own will. . . . Let him also consider that he is always [*semper et omni hora*] beheld from Heaven by God, and that his actions are everywhere seen by the eye of the Divine Majesty, and are every hour [*omni hora*] reported to Him by the angels." Also, in the twelfth degree, St. Benedict requires that a religious should in all places and at all times "think of the guilt of his sins, and imagine himself already present before the terrible judgment-seat of God," that by this means he may avoid further sin.

From these and other passages in the Rule it is clear our Holy Father relies for the progress of his disciple on his internal custody of himself; and this watchfulness a good soul will retain in all the external employments which necessarily fall to her. And this is the way Dame Gertrude proceeded, and the way all other souls advance that pursue a similar interior course. To such souls these words of the canticle may be applied: "*I sleep*"—that is, I cease for the time to elevate my will to God—"but my heart is watchful" of Him, and keeps itself in good dispositions, to be ready when the time comes to unite itself to Him.¹

The first substitute, then, for examination of conscience consists partly of solitude and a limitation of distracting occupations, by which means the occasions of sin are diminished, and, consequently, the need of examination; and partly of watchfulness over our

¹ "Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat" (Ca t. v. 2).

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thoughts, words, and deeds, by which we may avoid sins ; and these are best practised in Contemplative Orders.

The second substitute for examination of conscience is an interior propensity, provided the soul is in a state of life in which she can work on her propensity. Such souls do not easily fall into great sins ; and if they appear to fall, there may be no sin, or only a slight one in their case, because their affection is turned rather to God than to the sinful object, and this preserves them from a serious fall or injury. This grace proceeds from their profound recollections, which numb or mortify the affection for all that is not God, and cause their external indulgences and pursuits to be performed with little adhesion, and often with little or no sin. Such was the case with Dame Gertrude. Her recollections were so profound and her love of God so firm and constant that her external occupations were discharged with but little attachment, and consequently with less fault than appeared to be the case.

The third substitute is the practice of a recollection, or mental prayer, which the Sisters perform twice daily. The morning recollection practically covers the whole of the forenoon, as it is in a measure passed in interior solitude and recollection ; and the other time of prayer is in the evening. Although the Sisters do not make an express examination of conscience, still it is virtually made, for either the conscience or the Holy Spirit within it brings to their mind all sins and imperfections of moment incurred since the last recollection, just as surely as if they had made a careful examination. For we all, however spiritual, daily fall into various sins and imperfections, which we neither do nor can ob-

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serve, they being so secret and subtle. Concerning these the prophet says: "*Cleanse me, O Lord, from my secret sins.*"¹ And in another place the Scripture says: "*Seven times (yea, seventy-seven times) a day falleth the just man.*"² Such sins may be removed from the soul by other means as well, if not better than, by calling the sins to mind. For they are ordinarily of a kind that cannot be amended save by taking them up by the root, by breaking the habit from which they spring; and this can be done only by rising out of the state of nature and of sensibility, and by getting more into the spirit. And we get into the spirit in course of time by frequent profound elevations of the spirit during our recollections, and for this purpose a propensity to the interior and Divine grace are of great help. Souls who are without this propensity can only lop off the branches which daily spring up again; but the former in time take the tree up by the roots.

It is of the nature of these recollections to discover to the soul the impediments between herself and God. And these are not so much the actual sins we commit as the deliberate and habitual affection we have for them. The correction, therefore, of the fault is not sufficient, for the soul may, and usually does, continue in the same affection and habit of sin as before, and so she makes no progress. But in her recollections the soul is able to correct any want of resignation, any inclination to self-will, and all inordinate affections. For these are presented to her mind by a certain presence of God, Who is all light, and Who enlightens the soul to see these imperfections, which are of them-

¹ Ps. xviii. 13.

² Prov. xxiv. 16.

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selves but darkness and as nothing. Indeed, the soul is ordinarily in darkness concerning these things, but in her recollections she is enlightened concerning them by the Divine presence and light; and thereupon she profoundly resigns herself to God, and conforms herself to the Divine will, and by this means weakens the habit of irresignation and inordinate affection. Without such recollections the soul is in darkness, and cannot see the impediments which stand between herself and God. It is for this reason that souls who are in the immediate exercise of the will towards God can discover and correct their faults better than those whose exercise is in the imagination and discourse. For these are more occupied with the images of the things about which they discourse than they are with God; so that they are less able to see the impediments than the former, who in a manner regard God immediately, and thus see and remove any impediments that stand between God and themselves. Those that use their imagination and discourse do not perceive the hidden impediments between themselves and God, for it is the regarding God and His presence, and not the consideration of creatures and their images, that enlightens the soul and enables her to see her hidden inordinate affections. More palpable sins the soul can perceive by her internal senses and natural reason, and these she can amend. But the root or affection remains unseen, unknown, and will again break out into act when the soul least expects it. The root of such failings is almost beyond the scope of the senses and natural reason, or, if the root is perceived, the soul cannot remove it for want of the proper means.

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But the contemplative soul does not examine herself or her want of resignation or other deordinations, but immediately regards God, and God enlightens her so as to perceive her imperfections, in so far as He sees fit, and to amend them. Thus the soul acts, according to a certain writer, as one that looks at a wall in front of him. He not only sees the wall, but all that lies between him and it. Even so does the soul, regarding God, perceive all the impediments between herself and Him. And though there may be many secret and spiritual impediments which God does not discover to her, still, in spite of her ignorance, she in time gets rid of them. And this she accomplishes by transcending all her natural desires and inclinations in her recollections—a method which is as effectual as if her faults were visible to her sight. Nor is a reformation of soul or perfection obtained otherwise than by getting out of the natural man and his ordinary desires; nor does it matter whether we discover the defects or not, for they may be amended without being known; nor is there any need to know them. Indeed, there are some faults so secret and spiritual that they cannot be perceived by sense; hence this is the only way to remove them, unless God bestow on the soul an extraordinary, unusual, supernatural light. Thus God concurs in, or causes, the reformation of the soul by helping her to transcend her inferior nature, and it matters not, as I have said, whether the soul perceives her defects or not.

A fourth reason why an examination of conscience is unnecessary in the case of a soul that works upon her propensity is that a sin or imperfection which would seem small to another will appear great to her, and

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will adhere to her and gall her conscience, so that there will be no need to seek for her fault if it be worth remembering; and if it be not, why trouble about it? or why seek for what cannot be found, or when found, was not worth the seeking? Such minute and secret sins and imperfections are best removed (as spiritual writers tell us) by acts of love, or a general act of contrition, or by turning our regard upon God rather than upon the sins themselves. There is, indeed, no other way that will remove them so effectually; and much searching for them and minute examination of them will only obscure the mind and confound the soul without any corresponding gain. If contemplative souls act otherwise, they will find that they labour in vain, that they learn nothing by their scrutiny which they did not know before; and what is worse, they will excite fears and scruples, and imagine sins and defects where there was none. The reason of this is that such examinations are made chiefly by the help of the imagination and the light of nature, and this light is very fallacious. Besides, at such times the soul is not, and cannot be, in a state of recollection. The suitable light for such examinations is obtained only in a state of recollection, when the soul for the time is free from the images of sin and creatures; and this can be only at the beginning of the recollection, and not in the perfection of it, for then no thoughts are admitted but of God Himself. Indeed, women especially are naturally inclined to be timid and scrupulous, and such examinations would only increase their inordinate fears. Experience shows them that the practice of examinations is unsuitable for them, and surely they can judge better

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of their own case than others in quite different circumstances. In truth, there are few women, even of those who profess to follow the practice of examinations, who really continue long in them, except for more serious sins, to which contemplative souls are not much subject. Besides, such examinations imply a strong resolution of amendment of the sins discovered, and for a contemplative soul to promise herself or God an amendment of such small defects would be impossible. She can only hope to amend them in course of time with the aid of grace and exercises. No industry or violence of her own will be of any avail.

This was clearly the experience of Dame Gertrude, as may be seen by her words cited on a former occasion. She says that she was to amend her life as she could, and not as she would; that it was God's will that she should await a longer time for a total amendment; that in the meantime she should exercise patience with herself, amending little by little, and as she could, and that if she had proceeded otherwise she would never have corrected anything at all.

In truth, the defects of such souls are usually certain inordinate inclinations of nature which are reformed rather by grace and spiritual working than by promises, resolutions, or a violent haste; for the confidence of these souls is not in their own working, but in the Divine operation. Such was Dame Gertrude's method, and she found it successful.

Of course, I must not be understood, by what I have said, to decry in any way the less frequent examination required for the Sacrament of Penance. For this the soul will be able to call to mind some things or thing

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done since the previous confession, by which she will provide suitable matter for confession and absolution, though it may happen that the soul will sometimes have enough, and more than enough, to do to find the requisite matter.

There was a fifth substitute for examination of conscience in the case of Dame Gertrude and some of her Sisters, though not of all. It was this: that, owing to excessive timidity and scrupulosity when they had occasion to examine their conscience, their directors seriously advised them to esteem nothing to be a mortal sin, or a sin at all, unless they were certain; nor were they to consider that the act had been committed unless they were perfectly certain of it. Their timidity and scrupulosity rendered it inexpedient for them to examine their conscience without having this principle before their eyes, for they would be apt to think everything a mortal sin, and this would have worked nothing but confusion in their souls. Hence this principle was absolutely necessary for them, and without it they could not possibly have proceeded in the way of contemplation, but would have led a life of dejection, full of trouble and despair. Moreover, to hold to this advice and principle was an excellent mortification for their souls, for their nature impelled them to yield to their fears, but they were kept in check and restrained by this salutary principle. And if the principle had not been given to them, and had they not held to it, they would have been in danger of falling into a still greater sin, the sin of despair. Nor would such conscientious souls be emboldened to commit sin under pretext of this principle. Thus their minds were much relieved as

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regards their examination of conscience, for they could not be certain that anything was a sin, or at least a mortal sin ; and so this principle became their substitute for an examination of conscience.

Though this principle was given to help these particular souls, as there are many others, especially women, with a like tendency to scrupulosity, the principle may well be extended to them also, and it will be found to work on them the same beneficial effects, and preserve them from harm. Nothing else can secure their peace of mind, as Dame Gertrude and her Sisters found ; indeed, I know not how otherwise they could have held on in their course. And though a greater liberty could not have been given them than this principle, I do not see how they could have got on with less. This principle also helped them in their examination for sacramental confession. And though on occasion it might happen that someone would pass over a sin through error, this was a less serious evil than the consequences following the neglect of the principle : for then the soul would have fallen into habitual despondency, tepidity, and servile fear—a most miserable and distressing state. This principle, moreover, applies not only to souls that are in a strict sense scrupulous, but to those also who, through overmuch fear, stand in need of this help to keep them out of harm. But the exercise of this principle appertains properly to souls who have obtained a certain amount of control over themselves and their erroneous conscience, have acquired a more perfect love, and have abandoned servile fear. And this state is attained only after long exercise in contemplation, whereby that

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stability and clearness of conscience is acquired which will enable souls to judge aright concerning it, and to put away their inordinate fears, until they reach at length a condition which may be called normal. But until they come to such reformation, they have no remedy but the exercise of the said principle. When they have attained to a thoroughly settled state of conscience, and abandoned all inordinate fears, their own conscience and the Divine Spirit will then lead them to relinquish the foresaid principle as no longer needful or suitable for them.



CHAPTER XVI

THE PRAYER OF ARIDITY

YOU will remember that it was about All-Hallowtide, towards the end of the first year of her profession, that Dame Gertrude and I had a serious talk, and with some success, about the good of her soul. A long time passed before we met again, except by way of salutation. Indeed, at that time I had no great opinion of her, nor much hope that she was the better for the instructions; but, in fact, as it appeared afterwards, she was very busily and seriously pursuing them. Much struggling there certainly was at that time between the Holy Spirit and her nature, for it was a good while before she could get wholly into the way. Nor did I know what she did, till she came to me about the beginning of the following Lent, either on purpose or by chance. On talking with her, I at once saw that she was either in the way already, or so well disposed for it that she would shortly be in it. After that we met and conferred more frequently, and she grew more and more settled in the way, and I, for my part, animated and encouraged her. Indeed, this was the principal thing I had to do, and to bear her up against temptations that arose, either from her own nature or from the

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words and practices of others. I also often gave her general instructions ; but as for particulars, I always referred her to her proper internal Guide, the Holy Spirit. Still, now and then she would come with some particular question, wherein she was easily satisfied. She was now well on the way, and walked in it with courage, quietness, and satisfaction. She sought no more instructions, but followed her prayer at fitting times and in a fitting manner. The rest of her time was spent in the discharge of her other obligations, and her office of Cellarer, into which she was placed at the change of Abbess and President. Then, as regards indifferent things, she acted, as I pointed out, for the good of her spirit, and according to what she found or believed to be the Divine will or call therein. Living thus, she had no great suffering, or nothing so great as she had afterwards during the last two years of her life, when a doubt arose about the lawfulness of her way. During that time she was almost continually and profoundly afflicted by this temptation, which proceeded not from within, but was caused by others. From time to time, indeed, she was satisfied interiorly of the truth of her spiritual course ; still, she was not without some feeling of fear on account of the natural reasons, not easily answered, which were alleged against it, and the authority of the persons who raised the objections. In her recollections, however, she saw the truth of her way, and she was confirmed in it by the Holy Spirit. Even her natural reason concurred, for she remembered her experiences, and how unfit and insufficient were her former ways to accomplish her desires. She was also fully satisfied that she did not

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go counter to the obedience she owed to man. Still, during the six years which preceded this great cross she was not without some daily afflictions, little or great, in soul or body, such as everyone is subject to in this life, especially when living in community, and engaged in much external employment and conversation. Such circumstances are apt to breed many little annoyances and sufferings.

But perhaps Dame Gertrude's greatest affliction at this time was her temptation to repeat her former confessions. When she could get clear recollections the temptation was not felt; but during her frequent obscurities and desolations the feeling, and fear, and peril were strong upon her. Another affliction, almost as great, was the temptation of the obscurities and desolations themselves—a great probation and trial for her soul. Besides, there was the burden of sadness, to which she was subject constitutionally, or on occasion. These afforded abundant matter for acts of resignation, and consequently were of great profit to her soul. They also made her prayer more efficacious. Dame Gertrude, however, never omitted her prayer through these temptations or afflictions, but was all the more careful on their account to pursue it, because she had no remedy or comfort but to have recourse to God by means of prayer. Thus none of these temptations—no, not even her obscurities or desolations—prevailed over her or daunted her, but she obtained in prayer internal light of one kind or another for her needs, and with it grace and strength for her will. What kind of light and help Dame Gertrude received at such time it is impossible to state, but let it suffice to say that they

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were according to her needs. The nature of the light and help was known only to the Author of them, the Divine Spirit; but Dame Gertrude herself could see their good effect within her, though she could not well see how it was brought about.

These materials for resignation were the very means by which Dame Gertrude humbled herself to and under God; by these she exercised herself in that total subjection to God which she so much commends in her writings. It was in these recollections, these contemplations, that she discovered clearly wherein true humility consists—a thing which cannot be well understood by mere natural reason. Besides, in and by such contemplations, she was taught and enabled to exercise real humility towards God, and, according to His will, towards others also. Indeed, persons who had the best opportunities of knowing her could see plainly in the course of conversation that she understood what true humility and other Divine virtues are much more clearly than natural reason, good as it was, could have taught her. Besides, when she alluded to those virtues, she spoke with so much spirit and feeling that it was plain that she had had some internal experience of them.

In an earlier part of the volume I distinguished four kinds of prayer, and this manner of prayer may be described as a fifth kind, and may be called the “prayer of aridity.” It is true that Dame Gertrude’s ordinary prayer was the fourth kind, the prayer of sensible affections. But often she was unable to exercise affections, on account, as I think, of bodily indisposition. Still, this was no reason for giving up prayer, nor did she do so. She continued in it, in spite of aridity, and

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prayed as well as she could, and resigned herself for what she could not do. Aridity often afflicted her, and the same thing happens to others who exercise sensible affections, for they depend much upon the immediate disposition of the body. And this is subject to alteration, on account of a change in the weather, or for some internal cause, so that the body is often indisposed for sensible affections. And as Dame Gertrude could not fall back upon discursive prayer or meditation, because she was unable to meditate, there was nothing left but the state of aridity. Those souls who can meditate, or, in other words, can produce good acts after revolving images in their mind, are not much subject to aridity, because their exercise lies more in the intellective soul, which does not vary with the disposition of the body, as the affections are apt to do, but is commonly in one and the same disposition. If, however, the soul that usually exercises affections does what she can, notwithstanding her aridity,¹ she will be enlightened in her intellective soul; for the latter is as capable of illumination in the time of aridity as when sensible affections flow easily. And not only is the understanding capable of light, but also the other power of the soul, the will, receives grace and strength from God no less in the time of aridity than in the time of sensible affections; for the essential profit of the soul consists in the light and love of the intellective or spiritual soul, and not in the sensible feelings. Thus, by these means Dame Gertrude made no less progress in her prayer in time of aridity than she did when better disposed.

¹ By aridity is meant a dullness or coldness of the sensible will or sensible affections.

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But I am inclined to think that no one can adhere to his prayer through a long spell of aridity but such as have an interior propensity, like Dame Gertrude; for it is this that holds the soul to her prayer and helps to bear her up in all kinds of temptations and difficulties. Those who have not the support of the foresaid propensity may find it best to have recourse to discursive prayer, or, failing that, to vocal prayer.

Indeed, it should not be forgotten that in ancient days vocal prayer—commonly the Psalter—was used by all sorts of spirits and in all cases, until they arrived at contemplation. Vocal prayer supplied the place of meditation, immediate acts, sensible affections, and also served in the case of aridity. So that, whether the persons could discourse or not, or produce acts after reflection, or were in a state of aridity, they succeeded with vocal prayer, and were carried by it through all kinds of difficulties, temptations, and illusions. Indeed, no exercise short of contemplation is less liable to these dangers than vocal prayer, or is less hurtful to head or health. Moreover, considered in itself, vocal prayer is undoubtedly the most proper instrument to bring souls to contemplation. This, I think, is one reason why Holy Church obliges religious and priests to the recitation of the Breviary. As, however, we cannot endure in these days the requisite amount of abstraction and mortification, we must supplement vocal prayer with mental prayer.

But the principal reason why Dame Gertrude failed to benefit by her conferences with me long before All-Hallowtide was that she did not then know that any good use of prayer might be made in time of aridity;

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so that at such times she gave up prayer; but after All-Hallowtide she did not do so any more. There was also another thing. It was some time before Dame Gertrude found the means of helping herself in the prayer of affections; and I could not prescribe the kind of prayer to suit her, but told her that she must find out by her own experience and observation. There were two things only that I insisted on. First, that she must use some sort of mental prayer, and that it was her business to find what kind would suit her; and secondly, that she, like all others, was capable of mental prayer of one kind or another. This opinion was grounded upon the authority of a learned and experienced Jesuit, Father Alvarez, who in the third volume of his "Spiritual Perfection" states that there is no soul who is not capable of mental prayer of one kind or other.

CHAPTER XVII

DAME GERTRUDE'S SUFFERINGS DURING THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF HER RELIGIOUS LIFE

IN an earlier chapter I divided the mortification Dame Gertrude exercised under the three categories of *Doing*, *Abstaining*, and *Suffering*. There are a few things I should now like to add under each of these heads. Although Dame Gertrude spent most of her time in *doing*, it cannot be said to have contributed much to her immediate advancement, or the increase of perfection in her soul. It was rather a recreation, or a cessation from serious mental exercise. This was partly because such acts were but external actions, and partly because they were according to her natural inclination and the activity of her imagination. Nor did such external actions tend to give much edification to others, especially to spiritual persons. For though such actions are good and necessary, yet in themselves they are not the best, for they may be, and often are, performed out of natural inclination or custom, without any exercise of abnegation of will in which the main profit of the soul consists. Consequently, though Dame Gertrude did much active work, she did not make much progress thereby; nor could others easily

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perceive much spiritual progress in her in this particular.

Then with regard to *abstaining*—that is, abstaining from sin, immortification, and imperfection. Speaking generally, the soul can derive more profit here than she can by action or doing. But the profit consists in the greatness of the difficulty which our nature finds in abstaining: the greater the difficulty, the greater the good. But as abstaining consists principally in not doing, it is not so apparent to others as external action; so that others do not see very well the progress made by the soul, though perhaps interiorly she is making wonderful progress. As, however, abstaining tends to a certain innocence and purity of life, it cannot but yield some external tokens by which others may be at least to some extent edified. Such, in fact, was the case with Dame Gertrude. For after her conversion she was, I know, very careful in the matter of abstaining, and anyone attentively observing her external carriage would not fail to note in her a tendency to a more perfect manner of life.

Lastly, with regard to *suffering*. This, in its own nature, usually procures the greatest advancement for the soul, though none but God and the soul can well discern the degree of suffering. It may be almost infinitely great interiorly, and yet no one be aware of it. In these secret sufferings and the grace of prayer consisted Dame Gertrude's principal progress. For as regards *abstaining*, even our nature, if we are well disposed, will restrain us from doing exteriorly what will appear in the eyes of others to be evil. And as regards *doing*, Dame Gertrude's delicate health prevented her

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from undertaking much external employment, though it was good enough to enable her to retain the control of some things; nor could she perform much external mortification. Hence she was compelled to yield to dispensation from fasting, and to some extent from abstinence, and night choir, and even sometimes from a portion of the day hours. And as she had a good will, it must have been no small mortification to submit to these exemptions. Besides, Dame Gertrude was obliged, as much as anyone else in the house, to indulge in recreations and conversations.

But now to return to Dame Gertrude's sufferings—a matter of the utmost importance and benefit to a soul. For the sake of clearness, I will divide them into four periods. The first extends from the beginning of Dame Gertrude's religious life to the end of her second year. During this time she led a somewhat dissipated or extroverted life, not yet knowing how to live an interior one. The second period will be the succeeding six years; and the third, the following two years, during which time an extraordinary grief befell her, which lasted, we may say, the whole of that time. The fourth period covers the last nineteen days of her life.

As Dame Gertrude was not in the right interior spiritual course during the first period, she had little to help her to use her crosses profitably beyond what her nature afforded her, and this usually is little enough. For either the soul will not suffer at all, but yields to impatience—if not exteriorly, at least interiorly—or she suffers very imperfectly and with little purity of intention. Her cross will be carried, much as Simon of Cyrene carried his, under a kind of compulsion. Of

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course, Dame Gertrude had her crosses, like anyone else. Some came directly from God, but as she was of a good disposition and had a sensitive conscience, she never ventured to rebel against them. Still, wanting light and grace, she knew not how to turn them to good account. One cross particularly afflicted her at this time—it was the temptation to repeat her former confessions, contrary to the advice of her spiritual directors. She refers to it in her writings as particularly grievous, and much trouble she had on account of it. Her ingenuity and inquiring turn of mind made her search out difficulties about her former life and confessions which neither she nor anyone else could have solved for her by natural reason or learning. And if they could have answered her, the matter would not have ended there, but she would have found fresh difficulties, to her own misery and the annoyance of others. Indeed, there was no remedy but to desist from the confession of her former sins, and to abide by the reasonable advice of her spiritual guides. But to do this was most difficult, as the advice seemed to her quite contrary to the light of reason, which indicated (as she thought) the necessity of repetition. For though in some respects she had plenty of courage, in other ways she was easily daunted and perplexed. She certainly was not very successful in combating this temptation, for she had not at this time attained to the light and grace of a good practice of prayer, nor consequently to good obedience to God or confidence in Him. Indeed, Dame Gertrude was in a great dilemma. On the one hand, her spiritual director had expressed in the strongest terms in writing that she

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must not repeat former matter of confession, but must rest satisfied with what she had done; and she dared not disobey for fear of serious sin. On the other hand, her natural reason seemed to demonstrate to her the necessity of repetition. She thus hung suspended between two courses in an agony of perplexity; for she still regarded Superiors as mere creatures, and there was no true subjection of either understanding or will to them; nor had she a proper perception of their position till she obtained more immediate converse with God; and this wrought a more complete submission of herself to Him, and to others for Him, as she often tells us in her writings.

As to the crosses which came to Dame Gertrude by means of Superiors or others, these she bore well outwardly as far as her good name or credit seemed to require; but interiorly, as appears from her writings, they did her much harm, often resulting in murmurings, rebellions, impatience, immortification, and hardness of heart. The reason she took these crosses from others so badly was that she had a very capable head and was self-willed, so that it was no easy matter to yield to the judgment and will of others.

Thus far, suffering did Dame Gertrude more harm than good, estranging her from God even more than when she lived in the world; and not all mankind, including the Pope and the rest of the Church, with all their power, wisdom, and authority, could have brought about a reformation in her, though no one by nature could have been more afraid of eternal damnation than she was. It was He only Who first formed her could reform her, and only by means of a contemplation or

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regard of God Himself ; and to this practice she attained when once she passed into the right spiritual course. Indeed, no soul can become perfectly reformed and attain to true religious humility and obedience but by an immediate converse with God, through which the soul comes to know Him, and in Him to know herself, and thereby to obtain grace to live in accordance with that knowledge.

This receives confirmation in a passage to be found in Dame Gertrude's "Confessions." She says: "Nothing hath my Lord God left undone that might win me wholly to Himself, and make me despise myself and all created things for His love. For when I sinned He recalled me, and forsook me not in my misery at offending such omnipotent Goodness so shamefully ; and that also after my entry into religion, the happiness and worth whereof I did not yet know. By these means I grew weary of bearing therein His sweet yoke and light burden, which are heavy only through our own ault and not in themselves. Hence through our own fault and ignorance His yoke grew so intolerable to me that I wished often that it might have been shaken off lawfully by me, pretending that it was so incompatible with my good that I could scarcely work out my salvation in the religious state and profession. This, my God, Thou art witness of, is true, and so it did continue with me about two years after I had in appearance forsaken the world, and the world, indeed, forsaken me. But did my Lord in this bitter affliction forsake me? No, no ! but He provided such help for me by means of a faithful servant¹ of His that quickly

¹ Father Baker.

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was my sorrow turned into joy—yea, into such unspeakable joy that it hath sweetened all the sorrows which since that time have befallen me. For as soon as my soul was set in a way tending to my God by prayer and abnegation, I found all my miseries presently disperse themselves, and come to nothing. Yea, even in five weeks my soul became so enamoured with the yoke of this my dear Lord that if I must have made, not merely four, but four thousand, vows to have become wholly dedicated to Him, I should have embraced this state with more joy and contentment than ever I did find in obtaining that which ever I most wished or desired. Yea, as Thou knowest, my God, by my soul being put into a course of prayer, I seemed to have now found a true means whereby I might love without end or measure, etc.”

But to return to Dame Gertrude’s temptation to repeat her confessions. This temptation was the most grievous affliction that could have befallen her, because it penetrated profoundly into her soul, habitually adhered to it, and daily, hourly vexed it. The temptation, indeed, would have been of the greatest profit if she had been disposed for it. For crosses which come from without, however great and troublesome, are transitory and superficial, and so are light compared to the former cross, which appeared to Dame Gertrude as likely to engulf her in eternal damnation, the mere thought of which filled her with the utmost dismay. In the hope of obtaining relief, Dame Gertrude sought about this time to make another general confession, though she had done quite enough in this respect at the time of her profession. With this in her mind one day, as I

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was going to the altar to say Mass, she came to the church-grate, and told me that she was about to make a general confession, and begged of my prayers to that end. I promised to pray for her. But I could not help but pity her and smile at her proceeding, for I well knew that this was not the way to obtain the peace of soul that she sought. It was to be secured only by entering on a good spiritual course, about which she had treated with me once or twice, but so far without success. When she had made her general confession, she found herself not one whit the better—if anything, she was worse than before, in spite of all her own prayers and mine. And such is the usual proceeding, and, I may add, result, of an infinite number of good souls of both sexes, especially in religion, who put their greatest security and satisfaction in making and repeating confessions, both in their lifetime and at the hour of death. Yet for all that they have no security or true satisfaction; nor do they see the true state of their souls, for want of an interior light, which cannot be obtained in sufficient fullness except by the serious pursuit of recollection, solitude, and abstraction of life. And for this many of these souls have the requisite propensity, if they could only discern it. But as for confessions made without obligation or real necessity, they not only do not satisfy the soul nor afford security, but rather tend to obscure the light, and diminish true confidence in God.

CHAPTER XVIII

DAME GERTRUDE'S SUFFERINGS FROM THE SECOND TO THE SIXTH YEAR OF HER RELIGIOUS LIFE

As an introduction to the second of the periods into which I divided Dame Gertrude's sufferings, I will explain a little more fully the value and merit of suffering.

There are three things to be regarded in suffering. There is first the difficulty which we experience in bearing it; secondly, there is the measure of the intention with which it is received, or, in other words, the willingness or unwillingness with which we accept it; and thirdly, there is the purity of the intention with which we undergo the suffering. These three points, indeed, apply equally to matters of doing, abstaining, and suffering; and all good deeds may be comprised under these three heads.

Now, as the three points—the difficulty, the willingness, and the purity of intention—are purely internal conditions, none but God can judge absolutely of the perfection or otherwise of the soul therein. Of all mortals, the soul herself should know these conditions best, and those to whom she manifests them, though even the soul herself is usually an insufficient judge on

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account of the natural blindness which proceeds from self-love. But others, who judge by external tokens, are particularly liable to mistakes about these three points; for the soul may be quite satisfactory in her exterior carriage, but interiorly she may be very defective. Or, on the other hand, the soul may be quite well disposed interiorly, and yet exhibit some defects in her external deportment. Nevertheless, most men do not hesitate to judge others by their exterior.

Then, again, there are many internal sufferings which give no external indication of their presence, yet they may be far heavier and of greater merit than those that appear on the surface. Such, in fact, was the case with Dame Gertrude. Her sufferings of the greatest moment and worth were purely internal. And as for external sufferings, their merit entirely depends on the dispositions of the intellectual soul, and these are fully visible to God alone.

Purity of intention consists in doing, suffering, or abstaining for God alone, and for His sake, all ends of our own being excluded. The nearer our intention approaches to this, the purer it is, and *vice versa*. Of all three points, this is the one which manifests itself least exteriorly, and is most difficult for others to discern. For a person may suffer great things, and yet they may be worth nothing, for want of purity of intention; and on the other hand, a flea-bite borne with purity of intention is more meritorious of grace and glory than the most painful suffering borne with less purity of intention.

But in a contemplative soul the profit and perfection of the suffering will depend wholly upon prayer, and

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without prayer the soul will reap little good from it. At the same time, suffering helps prayer by making the prayer efficacious and profound, and by elevating the soul out of herself into God. Moreover, the greater difficulty our nature finds in the suffering, the greater usually will be the grace afforded, and the more excellent will be the resignation of the soul in prayer. But although prayer is good and profitable by itself, yet when it is accompanied by suffering, the soul makes much greater progress. Also, more perfect endurance of suffering is an effect of prayer, for in prayer we make acts of resignation and resolutions to abide in patience, and this obtains for us grace and strength to be patient and resigned afterwards out of the time of prayer. Hence there are three ways in which prayer helps us to suffer more perfectly. First, it gives grace to overcome the difficulties that our nature finds in suffering; secondly, it inclines the will to embrace suffering more willingly; and thirdly, it purifies the intention in suffering. From this it may be seen how much prayer helps us in suffering, and how unprofitable it is without prayer. For without it we have nothing but our nature to fall back upon, and this does not willingly suffer, or, if it accepts suffering, it is with little purity of intention. Nor do the Sacraments avail to enable us to suffer profitably without inward prayer. Almighty God, therefore, never fails to provide by one means or another sufficient occasions of suffering for the souls He is drawing to contemplation, or who have already attained to it; but He so tempers the sufferings that they may be proportionate to the degree of prayer and spiritual strength that the souls have obtained, or the

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grace that He intends to bestow for such sufferings. This was so with Dame Gertrude, as we shall see in the second period of her life, to which I shall now turn.

During this period, which extends from the second to the sixth year of Dame Gertrude's religious life, there were no very notable or extraordinary sufferings. Still, there were daily occasions of suffering such as fall to the lot of all mortals, especially in community life. These consist principally of contradictions to one's natural will or inclination in soul, body, good name, external goods, or friends. In all these respects Dame Gertrude, as all others, found some matter for suffering during these years, as an accompaniment or incitement to prayer; and though in themselves these sufferings were small, yet they were such as Almighty God esteemed to be sufficient for her present needs, or He would have laid upon her heavier burdens. But such is God's ordinary course with contemplative souls. He does not at the beginning of their spiritual life impose heavy crosses, but rather defends them, granting them health and strength and other requisites, lest their spirit be oppressed or hindered. The spirit of such souls is still green, tender, weak, unsettled, as regards both prayer and the habit of virtue; so that if a heavy cross fell on them, it would hinder them in their course. For this reason God protected Dame Gertrude from heavy afflictions during this time. However, besides the daily little sufferings incidental to her life, God exercised Dame Gertrude by two special sufferings, which were, we may say, habitual to her. They were of some moment and difficulty, and consequently were of great profit, as God gave her grace to bear them well. They

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were, moreover, internal afflictions, and therefore touched her deeply, penetrating into her very soul. The one was the temptation already alluded to in the former period—the temptation to repeat her former confessions, contrary to the advice of her spiritual guides. Though the temptation had afflicted her ever since she took the habit, it was not till she had entered into a good spiritual course that she obtained grace and strength to make a profitable use of it. In the former period, her crosses rather increased her defects than promoted her spiritual welfare; but now that she had entered into a right spiritual course, the way of Divine love, the temptation and all other crosses co-operated in the good of her soul and spiritual advancement. For by manfully resisting the pressure of the temptation, she continually increased in grace and spiritual strength, till at length she acquired the habit of resistance. By this means, great resignation to God was wrought in her soul, and this increased confidence in God and love of Him, and proportionately diminished dejection, pusillanimity, scrupulosity, and servile fear, which formerly darkened her soul, kept her from familiar intercourse with God, and rendered her life miserable. But now that through her spiritual course she obtained strength to resist her temptation, she grew to be more light-hearted, mistress of herself, and contented; and she gave greater satisfaction to others by her happy, merry ways. Only once during this period did she yield somewhat to this temptation, and this was occasioned by some sermons she heard or writings that she read, and which frightened her, so that she prevailed on me to allow her to repeat one or two former matters which she should not or

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need not have done, had she adhered to the advice given to her. But she herself soon felt and acknowledged her error, for in consequence of having yielded to temptation on this occasion, she experienced greater difficulty in resisting afterwards. She plucked up courage, however, and turned to good account her mistake ; for she learnt by experience the necessity of resisting her temptation more resolutely for the future. Henceforth she adhered firmly to her course, though the temptation not infrequently presented itself to her mind, and continued to do so till her last sickness and death ; for the temptation was inherent in her very bones, she having inherited it from her mother, who was a good devout lady, but given overmuch to scrupulosity and sadness. Such temptations, arising from our temperament and bodily constitution, usually cling through life, though in time, by the aid of spiritual exercises, their force diminishes, and may ultimately be almost extinguished.

The other considerable temptation—viz., a tendency to desolation and obscurity of soul—was also natural to Dame Gertrude, and constitutional, and clung to her more or less to the end. This consisted of a coldness or dullness of the will in the exercise of affections towards God, and a want of light in the understanding for discerning God and the Divine things appertaining to herself. But this temptation never prevailed over her—at least, after she entered her spiritual course—so far as to prevent her from tending to God by prayer, and from the proper care over herself ; for, even in her desolations, God defended her from the evil consequences of the obscurity by imparting as much internal

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light as was necessary, though not that degree of clearness which her nature craved and enjoyed at other times. This afforded her abundant opportunity for the exercise of resignation, and procured for her much secret grace for her will and secret light for her understanding. For true resignation obtains great grace or spiritual strength and light from God, whether the grace and light be perceived by the soul or not. As this temptation was also internal, it procured more grace than many external sufferings, for these do not pierce so deeply into the soul as the former. Of this temptation Dame Gertrude often makes mention in her writings. Her strong propensity towards God and His continual grace were the means whereby she kept herself up during these periods of obscurity, or otherwise she, like many others, would have abandoned her spiritual course.

Though these temptations were a great trial to Dame Gertrude, they were the outcome of the defects, as we have seen, of her own nature, rather than any special intervention of the hand of God. This is the way God usually deals with His young and tender spiritual scholars. He is content if they can bear up against their own natural defects, or endure the smart of habits contracted by their former negligences, or the natural blindness produced by them. To these defects, I think, St. Paul referred when he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. x. 12), saying that their temptations were such as were *human*; or to the Ephesians (chap. vi.), that their wrestling was *against flesh and blood*. But the temptations sent by God I may term *Divine*, although a man may be the instrument of the temptation, or rather probation. This is all the more apparent when the

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instrument is a good man ; for God often inspires good men to persecute other good men who are moved by God to exercise patience and resignation. Thus both one and the other are moved by the same Holy Spirit, for the merit and good of both alike. Hence we read of saints who persecuted one another, and without detriment to their sanctity, the difference between them arising from ignorance of some circumstance which they were not bound to know, and which God did not reveal to them. Thus they proceeded according to their light and knowledge, the Holy Spirit, perhaps, co-operating with them and urging them on. There might, therefore, be justice and truth, and consequently merit, on both sides, without bitterness or breach of charity, notwithstanding the contention, and each might be rewarded by God for his part in the dispute. Of this Dame Gertrude had a somewhat sharp and bitter experience, as may be seen in the following lines which she penned :

And in this way do not think much,
That thou must much endure ;
No, though it be from holy men,
For God doth this procure,
That thou mayst seek Himself alone,
And put thy trust in Him,
And not in any creatures living,
How good so e'er they seem.
For suffering by the means of th' ill
Will little thee advance ;
But to be censured by the good
Goes near to thee, perchance.

Dame Gertrude's meaning is that to be persecuted by evil persons is a kind of honour, for it will be sup-

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posed that justice is on the side of the one attacked, and this makes amends for the bitterness of the persecution. But if the aggressor be good, or esteemed to be good, then, in addition to the bitterness of the persecution, there will be a certain degree of discredit, for people generally will believe that justice lies on the other side. Besides, the worth and authority of the aggressor may shake the other's confidence in the justice of his cause, especially if he be of a timid conscience. Such was precisely the case with Dame Gertrude, as we shall see presently.

In such contentions, however, there is a great difference when the aggressor is guided by the Holy Spirit, and when he is led by his own natural spirit and will. In the former case, on discovering himself to be in the wrong, he will, with humility, acknowledge his mistake, and desist, however great the shame and humiliation. For God often leads good men into a course of action, and by some means He turns it to their external confusion and internal mortification, by which they reap much profit. But when the aggressor is led by his own spirit and inclination, he is apt to defend one error by another, a lesser by a greater, seeking to make good what he had unwisely and under the influence of passion begun, and thereby he reaps only greater confusion in the end. But commonly, when the work is undertaken under the impulse of the Divine Spirit, it attains the end intended by the soul herself and by God from the very first, and usually with some matter for humiliation arising in the course of it.

CHAPTER XIX

DAME GERTRUDE'S SUFFERINGS FROM THE SIXTH YEAR OF HER RELIGIOUS LIFE TILL HER LAST SICKNESS

WE come now to the third period into which the sufferings of Dame Gertrude were divided. This period covers the last two years of her life, down to the sickness which carried her off. In addition to the two temptations already described, and the daily solitudes and crosses which fell to her through her office of Cellarer, there came to Dame Gertrude and her Sisters at this time a most grievous temptation and probation sent by God. Indeed, it was the most grievous trial that man, the devil, or, if I may say so, God Himself could devise, when we consider the nature of the trial, the source whence it came, and the condition of those upon whom it fell. The trial was nothing less than a serious doubt as to whether Dame Gertrude and her Sisters were pursuing a manner of prayer that was safe and sound, and it resulted in a full and careful inquiry into their practices. The doubt and inquiry arose from the appointment by our Congregation of certain persons (whose names, I hope with all my heart, are written in the Book of Life) to watch over the spiritualities of the convent. They had nothing but

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the good of the convent at heart, and were prompted by the best of motives, but this did not make the trial less heavy.

It is said by the Wise Man that there is nothing new under the sun. And this saying is not without its application in the present instance, for Dame Gertrude was not the first to suffer in this way. About sixty years before, the Jesuit Father Baltazzar Alvarez had to undergo a similar inquisition. This holy servant of God had been called by God from the exercises peculiar to his Society, to practise interior prayer of the will. For some years he pursued this manner of prayer with much spiritual profit, and began to recommend it to others whom he thought capable of it. As he was Rector of a college, and esteemed for his learning and holiness of life, his manner of prayer was taken up by others, and was commended by them in conversation and in their correspondence. The novelty of the kind of prayer exercised and commended by Father Alvarez soon began to attract attention, and some Fathers, zealous for the honour and good of the Society, not only questioned the prudence of his course, but condemned his manner of prayer as unsuited and even opposed to the spirit of the Society. These complaints at length reached the ears of the General, who thereupon took steps to ascertain the truth of the charges against Father Alvarez. Accordingly, some Fathers were sent down to inquire into his manner of prayer, and after a diligent examination Father Alvarez's prayer was confirmed and approved, not only for himself, but for any others whom God might call to exercise it.

The application of this account to Dame Gertrude

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will be readily seen. No one would think the honour of the Society was in any way injured by the inquiry ; for, on the contrary, it is much to the credit of an Order that some at least of its members should exercise pure spiritual prayer, and this after a full examination and the formal approbation of Superiors. Nor could those who promoted and urged the inquiry be blamed, as they showed great zeal for the good of their Society and of souls. So in the same way it could not be thought hurtful to our Congregation that such an inquiry should be held concerning the manner of prayer of some of its members, however unpleasant it might be to the individuals concerned. Nor could those who promoted and carried out the inquiry in a humble and charitable manner, with the authority of the Congregation, be in any way blamed. Indeed, I may go farther and say that the Congregation never had a greater honour conferred on it, because the examination showed that true spirituality, through Divine operation, flourished in the Congregation, and received after examination the seal of approval of the Congregation. For of what value are earthly riches or anything else in the Congregation, save in so far as they may help to promote spirituality ? Or what is the Congregation worth, however well the choir be attended and the Office chanted, and regular discipline observed, if it be without true spirituality ? It will be no more than a dead body—a body without a soul. But if it have spirituality—real, true spirituality—then how full of life and noble will it be ! And the more intensive and extensive is the spirituality—that is, the more sublime the degree of spirituality, and the more widely diffused

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among the members of the Congregation, or the more souls that dispose themselves and tend towards it—the more full of vitality and the nobler will the Congregation be!

I am not, however, so much concerned with the defence of the Congregation, for it stands in little need of vindication, but rather I am concerned to trace the effect of the doubts and inquiry on the spiritual life of Dame Gertrude. And, certainly, of all Dame Gertrude's trials, none pierced her so deeply to the quick or was so profitable to her soul as this. It exercised her resignation, and made her recourse to God more efficacious and profound than anything the wit of man could have devised. It was a probation, as I may say, of God's own making, specially designed for the good of her soul, to hasten her perfection, to purify her soul, and to secure a happier death.

Thus writes a correspondent who was intimate with her: "The great zeal which Dame Gertrude had for the common good of the house, her labours to promote peace and quiet therein, and her sufferings for the same, were such as I am not able to express. If one should go to particulars, there would be no end—God only knows it. For God's sake she did suffer and undergo all with so much internal peace and external patience that those who know but in part the occasions of her suffering do wonder at it. And in all the time since these difficulties have been, I could never observe by her words or behaviour, or in any other way, that they touched her interior in such wise as to hinder the peace and quiet of her soul or tendance towards God. Yea, on the contrary, they did much,

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and very much, to forward and advance her in the way of love, resignation, and confidence towards God, and drive her more and more towards Him, as she hath often upon occasion in this time affirmed to me. She said this was an exercise provided by God Himself, Who only knows and sees what is convenient and best for us. Therefore it deserves to be worthily received and accepted as the greatest sign of His love that could happen to us. And how ungrateful of us towards God it were, if we should esteem these afflictions otherwise than to proceed from His fatherly love and providence for trial and exercise of our fidelity towards Him. And so far as others had been cause thereof, or in any way contributed thereto, they were to be esteemed as God Almighty's instruments in the work, and therefore not to be loved or respected the less, but rather more, by us. Much more to this effect hath she often said to me upon occasion, which plainly showed how free she was from all aversion towards those that were the cause of these difficulties."

Dame Gertrude often observed to her intimate friends that corporal afflictions and crosses from without, which do not obscure and perplex the mind, were as nothing to her. These she could digest with facility, if not with pleasure, by an immediate recourse to God, her soul being clear and free; and thus she dissipated these crosses, with their attendant images. But the crosses that tended to breed doubts or confusion in the soul itself were crosses indeed of unspeakable affliction and peril—not only in themselves, but also in their effects, by obscuring the mind and rendering it less capable of enduring external afflictions in a proper manner. But

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when Dame Gertrude was clear and quiet interiorly, she made small account of such accidents. Of the former kind of crosses three were habitually with her during this period—namely, the inclination to repeat her former confessions, obscurity or desolations, and the doubt raised about her spiritual course.

Let me speak a little more fully about the latter. A spiritual life consists in following the Divine light and impulses, in humbling and subjecting the soul to God and to all creatures according to His will, in loving God above all things, in pursuing prayer, and performing it according to Divine guidance—all qualities proceeding from the Divine operation, a state into which none but the Holy Spirit could bring the soul. Now, would anyone imagine that the Divine Spirit would urge or permit Dame Gertrude to relinquish such a course? or could she have done so without leave of the Holy Spirit, or without knowledge of a better course? The Divine Spirit never works a change in a soul except for the better, and He makes the way clear to her that she may embrace it. But if Dame Gertrude had relinquished her course, what would have become of her? She would only have returned to the natural state in which she had been till, by aid of the instructions already described, she entered the school of the Divine Spirit. There she found the interior satisfaction which she had so long sought, and attained with so much difficulty. And should she now abandon all for—she knew not what—and bring herself into her former blindness and misery? What dishonour and ingratitude to the Divine Spirit, and how woeful to herself? No man living was able to put her into a course that was better or as good. For

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he must bring her into the course of the Divine Spirit, or she would not be in the right way for her soul. And clearly, as we have seen, she was already in the school of the Divine Spirit, and of this her conscience was fully persuaded. What, then, remained for her to do but to abide in her course, and to die in it, as in truth she did ?

Dame Gertrude tells us in her writings why she so much relished the instructions she received from me. It was because they directed all capable souls to the permanent, unchangeable Master and Teacher, Who ever taught contemplative souls the same kind of doctrine, and was never in contradiction with Himself ; whereas directors who do not refer the soul to the Divine Master are as changeable and repugnant to one another in their instructions as they are changeable in their office. They are here to-day and gone to-morrow, each differing from the other in his manner of teaching and in his solution of doubts. For this reason, souls that are thus guided can never come to perfection of knowledge or of life, as Dame Gertrude, through much experience, insists in her writings.

I have frequently noted that the spiritual scholar should not ply his director with questions except at the impulse or with leave of his internal spiritual guide. This doctrine Dame Gertrude was careful to observe. Thus she writes : " When I have asked a question, though it seemed so reasonable that any man would have judged I had done it out of necessity and right judgment—yea, would have warranted me that I had done very well in it, and the best that could be, yet, coming afterwards to my recollection, I had plainly seen that my questioning was out of immortification,

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and have been checked by God for it in my conscience, and no good hath come to me by it; nay, much obscurity and dejection. This is, for the most part, the reward of such a proceeding in souls who are offered by God to be resolved of their difficulties for the most part by Himself. This I have somewhat dearly learnt by experience. Also I have found that when I have done a thing which I thought necessary, and yet it hath not been so, but rather it had been better to have let it alone, as afterwards I found, yet having proceeded in it with indifference and resignation, as I well hope I did, and not able to discern which was best, God in such cases hath always turned to my good by some mortification or other that happened in it or by it, which yet never obscured me, as in the former case, but rather much enlightened."

There exists sometimes between the Superior and subject a natural love and friendship, which causes a certain openness and intimacy between them. As this is agreeable to nature, it is more of a hindrance than of profit in an internal life, so that an interior soul will not indulge in it. If the Superior expects tokens of love and friendship, and cannot have them, he will be dissatisfied and apt to conceive a dislike towards the subject and his spiritual course. But this misliking will be more profitable to an interior soul than to seek the Superior's favour and friendship, for this cannot but be a great distraction and hindrance to his spirit. Indeed, a certain aloofness and reserve will be far better, except when the good of the subject requires otherwise for counsel's sake on some particular occasion. God, knowing this well, generally finds a way of breaking

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this inordinate affection and friendship between the soul whom He is interiorly guiding and the Superior, and brings about a kind of separation or detachment of mind, whereby the soul perhaps may suffer some difficulties and crosses at the hands of her Superior. This will be best for the soul, and will check her inordinate attachment towards her Superior, and thereby enable her to be more recollected and familiar with the Divine Spirit.

It may be objected that such souls will feel a want of security at the hour of death. For how can the Superior or his representative testify to the satisfactory state of the soul's conscience if he be not fully acquainted with it, or the director thereof? Alas, how can any man of himself, however much he may try to direct the soul, give her an assurance that she is in a good state? Who can give such an assurance and internal satisfaction but the Divine Spirit Himself, who is the Author of those lights and impulses, obedience to which alone can afford security of conscience in life and at the hour of death? As no man can give this security and satisfaction, so neither is the soul capable of it unless she lead an interior life. For interior souls alone receive or perceive the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, from which there proceed the security and satisfaction obtainable in this life.

Hence extroverted souls are incapable of this interior security and satisfaction. The only security that they can have (and it is a very feeble one) is from without, from some mortal to whom they have manifested their interior as best they could. Yet even he, through insufficient knowledge, may promise peace where there is no peace. For though he should hear his penitent's confessions all his life, he cannot by all the absolutions

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in the world give that satisfaction which interior souls who are familiar with the admonitions and impulses of the Holy Spirit enjoy. Hence St. Paul says: "*The Spirit Himself beareth witness to our spirit that we are the children of God*"¹—that is, that we enjoy His love and favour. Let, then, interior souls take comfort in this: that they have the assurance that God ordinarily gives to such souls, and which no Superior or creature, for all he may know of the soul, could ever bestow. All that Superiors can do is to dispose capable souls for an interior life, wherein alone this assurance can be obtained. By this means Dame Gertrude enjoyed a security and satisfaction which rested not on the testimony of man, but on the mercy and goodness of God. She made, however, such use of man as God willed, by receiving from him the means of grace, the holy Sacraments and rites of the Church, though she neither trusted in them, nor in her use of them, nor in the administrators of them, but only in the goodness of God, to Whom she wholly surrendered herself.²

¹ Rom. viii. 16.

² This passage might seem to suggest a depreciation of the Sacraments as a means of grace, but doubtless Father Baker means that they are not intended as *substitutes* for prayer and the interior life; and are not merely mechanical means of sanctification. On page 44 we saw that Dame Gertrude "ever entertained an ardent desire" for the Sacraments. Cf. also Father Leander's "Memorial" (pp. 556, 557, "Sancta Sophia"): "Whereas the author [Father Baker] disputeth much against the using of confession of venial sins, as necessary to spiritual profit, it is to be understood that he doth not in any wise condemn the discreet use of frequent confession, but only the needless enumeration of venial sins and daily defects which some souls do make in their confessions with great anxiety of mind . . . and is commonly a cause of scruples—

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We see, then, how little cause has a soul that has discharged her conscience according to counsel, and has found light and satisfaction in her recollections, to make general confessions out of her own head without guidance of the Holy Spirit, in order to obtain from man a warrant for dying securely. No, the only satisfying warrant is derived from the Holy Spirit, and the testimony of our own conscience witnessing to us that we have already done that which the Divine Spirit in our recollections and in other ways required of us as regards confession. God is witness of his reins—that is, of an interior soul—and a true searcher of his heart.¹

The reason of this difference between interior souls and others is not that the former have a clearer and more certain testimony from God that they are in a state of grace, for this would require a special revelation, but that they have a clearer sight of their interior, by which they see that they have corresponded with their light and impulses, and are prepared to follow the Divine will in all that appears to be such, and see no impediment between their soul and God—that is, they do not consciously retain affection to creatures, but see that they are immediately united to God in will and affection according to the manner of this life. This gives that satisfaction and security of conscience which is the best warrant that ordinarily can be had in this

one of the greatest banes of the spiritual life. So that for souls that are by nature prone to fear and scrupulosity, the confessor must of necessity moderate them both in the frequency of confession and the matter to be confessed," etc.

¹ "Renum illius testis est Deus, et cordis illius scrutator est verus" (Apoc. ii. 23).

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life, and affords the greatest hope and confidence in God. Other souls are without this, and have such assurance only as can be given by the senses, or by man by means of the Sacraments he administers, or by comforting words, the soul remaining still in her natural interior darkness and ignorance, so that they cannot be without much fear and doubt about their state. Their remedy is hope grounded on faith, which every Christian who does the best he can is required by God to hold fast by, and this will, by God's goodness, bring him to Heaven, notwithstanding his interior darkness.

Ignorance, trembling and fear, however, in so far as they are filial, are not wanting in interior souls according to their measure of grace and progress in spirit. Thus St. Paul, though he did say for his and our comfort that the Spirit testified to his spirit that he was the child of God, still, he was not certain that he was in a state of grace, for he said: "*Though my conscience does not accuse me of anything, I am not thereby justified.*"¹ God reserves from us perfect assurance to keep us humble and to provide matter for resignation. Still, an interior soul has the best assurance that can be ordinarily obtained, and this from within herself, and not from without. The latter way does not afford a satisfactory assurance, nor do the corporal senses within us. It is to be had only by means more spiritual, above the senses—namely, by the Holy Spirit testifying to our spirit, as St. Paul has pointed out.

Another objection that is made on behalf of the Superior (or director) is the account that he must

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 4.

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render of the souls under his charge. Now, the kind of account which he must give is made known to us, not only by reason, but expressly by our holy Rule, which commends to the pastor, as to one who himself observes the internal admonitions of the Holy Spirit, our Saviour's words—that the sound, or those that live well, need not the physician nor his solicitous care. In short, the pastor must not yield to timidity, anxiety, and meddlesomeness, whereby he would trouble the internal peace of his flock, and render them less able to attend to the Divine voice in their interior. The same thing is inculcated in the passage of the Rule where it says that the Superior must know that he has taken upon himself the care of infirm souls, and not to tyrannize over the sound or good-living ones. This St. Benedict exemplifies by the parable of the Shepherd, who leaves the ninety-nine in the desert that need not his solicitude to seek the sheep that was weak and needed his care. Much more to the same effect will be found in this chapter. The same thing is also expressed in the first chapter of the Rule, when St. Benedict, speaking of the Abbot's office, says that the Abbot's solicitude should be for the negligent, unquiet, or vicious. Hence the account the pastor must render is to correct those that do amiss, and to let alone those who conduct themselves well, lest by busy-ing himself about them overmuch, he should rather hinder than promote their spiritual good. He should presume that his sheep do well both interiorly and exteriorly, unless it appear otherwise by exterior signs. For it is impossible for a soul to be in a bad way interiorly without manifesting it outwardly. For the

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Superior, without such indications, to busy himself and trouble his subjects about the interior working of the Holy Spirit would be to expose himself and them to great confusion and peril. For these internal matters are not easily explained, so that error might easily arise on the part of one or the other. Besides, the simplest and least learned soul knows how to correspond with the Divine Spirit and His impulses, but may find it most difficult to give any account thereof. Nay, she may even be ignorant of the nature of her internal exercises, yet at the same time know in practice how to correspond with the Divine guidance, however secret and subtle. Indeed, though the soul be even very learned, she may have much difficulty in stating her case and internal exercises in a way to be intelligible to another, unless he be experimentally more experienced than herself in such matters. Hence the best course for the pastor to pursue in the discharge of his office is to busy himself about his flock only when by external signs he judges it to be expedient; otherwise let him keep quiet, and let his flock enjoy peace, especially if he sees that they are under the conduct of the Holy Spirit. In a word, the pastor must see that he does not disquiet and trouble souls that would do better left alone, as well as that he correct those whom he finds doing amiss.

Having stated various objections alleged against a true spiritual course, Dame Gertrude, in one of her "Confessions," continues as follows: "Thus and in an infinite number of other ways, as is known to Thee, have I experienced, and even from them whom I would have expected, by the place they hold, to have

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heartened me in my desire of tending to Thee to the utmost ability of my soul. And well might they do it, seeing they were also in place where they were bound to reform in me what was and is amiss in my life, which, I must confess, is very much; but yet I confide in Thy help. Thus, therefore, it stands with souls that in these days would lead a spiritual life. But those who place all their hope in Thee, my God, shall remain as stable as a rock, and in Thee, Who art their Strength and Refuge, they live peaceable and content, having the testimony of their conscience to be their comfort amidst all oppositions and contradictions. But the greatest objection which I have heard—and it is one that goes nearest to my heart—is when I read or hear that it is perilous to walk the way of love, and that (as some would seem to prove) no soul in any other course or state is in such peril as is a soul who giveth herself to this pursuit. But let them affirm that who will; for my part, I will shut my ears from hearkening to such men, because nothing is so plain, more easy, more secure, more pleasant, than the way of love. For that way of love it cannot be called if the soul seek in it anything but Thee alone, which those men would make it impossible for one to do. But Thou knowest, my God, that in this Thou art wronged. . . . And let not souls, therefore, I beseech Thee, by any such frights be brought into fear of walking this most noble and amiable way, but let us sing in hope: ‘*Dominus illuminatio mea, et salus mea quem timebo? Si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos?*’ Let us proceed humbly, till we be permitted to enjoy Thee, the God of Gods, in Sion, where Thy praise shall be perfected in us. These

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things, therefore, remembering and recounting before Thee, do strengthen my soul, that it fall not from the steadfastness which is grounded upon Thee. To hearten and encourage my soul by speaking and writing thus to Thee was the cause why those things have been written by me, which I read when I cannot (for some indisposition in body or mind) otherwise think upon Thee. And when I am overwhelmed with any misery, it becometh most tolerable by having this conference with Thee, Who never disdaineth me, for which all glory be given to Thee, Who art my Lord and my God, blessed for all eternity. Amen. Alleluia !”

Although all suffering consists in a contradiction of the natural will, still, there are degrees of suffering. The lowest degree, speaking generally, is about external things, as loss of worldly goods, of kindred and friends. Suffering in these matters is of the least moment, especially in religious persons. Next in importance come bodily suffering, wants, and inconveniences ; these a man feels more than external losses, as Satan well understands. For when he had inflicted loss of goods and children on Job, he said to God : “ *But put forth Thy hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and then Thou shalt see that,*” etc. (Job ii.). The third degree of suffering is in the matter of fame, honour, and esteem. Generally speaking, a man values these more than the former, and would sooner suffer loss of worldly goods or endure bodily pain than be touched in his honour or in the esteem of others. The fourth degree obtains when the matter is solely internal, and is related, not to the three causes of suffering already alluded to, but to God—as to whether God is pleased or displeased

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about a particular matter. This suffering is more intense than the other three kinds of suffering by how much the more precious and virtuous the soul is ; for this suffering does not fall upon any but such as have a desire to please God, and fear to offend Him or lose His grace. As this is a purely internal and spiritual matter, the soul is not so sure that she is acting rightly as she is, or may be, about her sufferings in the other three degrees which relate to sensible things. For instance, when one is in a state of bodily pain, one knows at once there can be no sin in it, because it is sent by God ; but internal matters not being so sensible, the soul has not the same assurance that she is right, though she has ground enough for hope, and that suffices. This want of perfect assurance is, through the providence of God, for the soul's good ; for it causes a far greater and more sublime resignation, and on account of the matter itself being so spiritual, the suffering penetrates deeper to the quick of the soul.

This is exemplified by the three great internal sufferings by which Dame Gertrude was afflicted, and to which allusion has already been made. They were the temptation to repeat certain matters of her former confessions, desolation and obscurity of soul, and the temptation to abandon her spiritual course. In all three there remained a natural fear and want of assurance, which rendered her resignation very great and meritorious. This is apparent in the first of these sufferings. For how could there but be much fear in her soul when her natural reason seemed to demonstrate or dictate contrary to her reason, directed by grace ? Then in the second temptation, arising from desolation

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and obscurity, the soul draws out of them a fear that she is not in the grace of God, or that she offends God in many actions, whereas she does not. Thus the soul has no assurance that she is pleasing God, but rather much fear to the contrary, so that her only remedy is resignation, and hope against hope (*spem contra spem*). So also in Dame Gertrude's third temptation, the temptation to abandon her spiritual course. Dame Gertrude could not but have much fear as to how she stood with God, on account of the timidity of her sex and disposition, the delicacy of her conscience, her lack of learning, and want of the aforesaid assurance. Now, suppose the Superior were to command her to pay no regard to Divine inspirations (a thing no Superior would do expressly), but to regard his own orders only, she would rightly disobey him, but at the same time she would experience some sense of fear in disobeying.¹ For her vow of obedience, made at her profession, being an external, sensible act, would sensibly press upon her the obligation to obey, whereas the Divine inspirations were purely spiritual and insensible. But such fears Dame Gertrude turned to her own good, for they afforded abundant matter for resignation.

Thus it may be seen how God provided Dame Gertrude with most profound and profitable trials, beyond anything that could be imagined by others, who commonly know nothing of their neighbours beyond what comes under their external senses.

It was to these three temptations, I think, that Dame Gertrude referred in the words cited above, where she says: "I find that God, in and by the exercise of prayer

¹ Cf. note, p. 51.

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(wherein temptations are presented to the soul and overcome), doth find such means to humble my soul that all the creatures in the world could never have found them out for me, and also sends me such internal crosses," etc. ("Apology,")¹ Often, too, did Dame Gertrude tell me that external crosses, even though of some weight, were as nothing to her internal afflictions. Indeed, so heavy were they that, as she tells us in one of her "Confessions," they almost consumed her strength. "What shall I render," she says, "for this Thy infinite benefit² bestowed on me? Verily, if I should be despised by all the world, as I justly deserve to be, and should have and feel the pains of all that ever have suffered for Thee, and should be shut up in a place which were only big enough to contain me, and were debarred of the Sacraments (of which I believe and acknowledge myself to be unworthy), by which grace to souls is abundantly imparted by Thee, and were held for a reprobate by all that are most esteemed and respected by me, yet this were little to endure in requital of this benefit, which I here have recounted before Thee. This I read with so much joy that it is a solace in those difficulties which are known only to Thee, and which would, if I were not exceedingly helped by Thee, quite overwhelm me. For, as it is well known to Thee, they do oftentimes make my strength to decay, so that I seem to be left without so much as is sufficient to go even about the house. But when I have been thus dealt with by Thee, I have been withal

¹ Contained in Volume II.

² The benefit here referred to is that of having been brought into the right spiritual course.

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enabled more frequently¹ to praise Thee." Thus did Almighty God provide a substitute for voluntary mortifications of which Dame Gertrude was incapable, her body having barely enough strength to serve her spirit. Moreover, internal mortifications have the advantage of being less subject to vainglory and pride, because less visible to the eyes of others. Besides, these mortifications are securer, being sent by God, and not assumed, and being internal, they partake of that piety of which St. Paul says it is profitable to all things.

In one of Dame Gertrude's "Confessions," written probably at the very time² when she was seized with her last illness, there are words which clearly indicate how well she was interiorly disposed for death, and fully resigned and confident in God. These are her words: "I will therefore sing unto Thee mercy and judgment all the days of my life, wishing always that Thy will, which is justice itself, may be wholly and perfectly accomplished in me, Thy sinful servant. Let me live as long as it pleaseth Thee, or die in the very beginning of these my desires to love; send sickness or health, sudden or lingering death, poverty or abundance, good fame, or that by all the world I be despised; in fine, in all do with me as it is most to Thy honour. For in this I place all my comfort and happiness, faithfully to serve Thee, and to be little or great in Thy eyes, as seemeth best to Thee. For I count it a

¹ "Fervently" is the word in the printed edition of 1658.

² This is the last of Dame Gertrude's "Confessions." The previous one was written on July 22, the Feast of St. Mary Magdalen, and it was on the 29th or 30th that Dame Gertrude was taken ill.

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sufficient reward for all that I shall ever be able to do or suffer that Thou hast admitted me, unworthy wretch, into a place of living where I may know and even see with my eyes how to serve and please Thee. This, I say, is more than can be deserved by me. For to serve Thee is an honour above all that can be imagined by me. Yet without any regard of recompense it is due to Thee that I serve and love Thee with all the forces of my body and soul ; which grant I may now begin to do and persevere therein till my end, that I may for Thy own sake obtain the happiness eternally to praise Thee."

That Dame Gertrude wrote thus, not out of vain-glory, but in humility, for the comfort of her soul, may be gathered not only from the manner in which she expresses herself, but also from this: that no one was aware of what she had written—neither myself, nor the correspondent to whom I have often alluded, nor anyone else. Her "Confessions" became known only after her death, when they were discovered among her papers. From these writings we may gather what were Dame Gertrude's spirit, virtue, and spiritual knowledge in the following prime points :

First, Dame Gertrude had an habitual, immediate regard of God, which is contemplation. This was the root of all the good that was or could be in her. Her contemplation was a life in spirit elevated above the troublesome distractions of corporal, particular images, so that she could at all times with facility and immediately¹ treat with God, and was capable of receiving, observing, and pursuing the Divine inspirations.

¹ By *immediately* is meant the direct operation of the will without the interposition of sensible images.

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Secondly, by this means Dame Gertrude perfected or much increased the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity.

Thirdly, she grew in humility.

Fourthly, she improved the purity of her intention in all that she did, or abstained from, or suffered.

Fifthly, she increased in the virtue of obedience to God, a virtue which implies a total subjection and resignation to Him in all that concerns soul and body; obedience to human authority, and to all creatures according to Divine ordinance; and conformity of her will in all things to the Divine will, wherein consists the consummation of all virtues.

Sixthly, from this resignation proceeded confidence in God, a confidence which can be deserved or obtained only by such total resignation.

These virtues, which are general and contain all particular virtues, such as patience, zeal for the common good, etc., were much improved by Dame Gertrude's contemplation and communion with God, as I shall show presently from her writings, especially from her "Confessions," which may properly be called prayer, prayer being taken in its general sense of a converse with God by love or other manner of worship. This kind of prayer discloses to us her virtues better than any external deeds or conduct, for true virtue consists only in the interior, or in external conduct in so far as it proceeds from interior virtue. For if the interior be truly virtuous, then likewise are the external deeds and sufferings proceeding from it truly virtuous and meritorious. How, then, can we learn the inward disposition and state of Dame Gertrude's soul better

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than by surveying her interior life, which she lays bare in her "Confessions," as in the very sight of God? Men in their external carriage frequently pretend to be different from what God sees them to be; but the soul that speaks to God otherwise than as she thinks is simply guilty of profanity and folly. Hence these "Confessions" of Dame Gertrude not only manifest the condition of her interior, but they also show the actual interior exercise of her virtues in prayer; for, as I have intimated, the "Confessions" were, for the most part, actual prayer and an exercise of her internal virtues. I will therefore make some observations founded on Dame Gertrude's writings, by which the quality and source of her virtues may be seen. And as all true virtues have their principal relation towards God, so of all knowledge none is so necessary, especially in the spiritual life, as the knowledge of what God is. I will therefore first show what Dame Gertrude's knowledge of God was, what she understood God to be; and then I will speak of her virtues as disclosed in her writings, for her internal habits and exercise of virtue best show the worth of her external actions and sufferings, as these external doings take all their goodness from the quality of the internal acts.

The knowledge which Dame Gertrude had of God was of that kind which spiritual writers declare to be the truest knowledge of which we are capable in this life, and that is by way of negation—that God is none of those things which we can imagine or conceive with our understanding. That such was her knowledge and apprehension of God is evident from a favourite passage of hers from "The Following of Christ," in which the

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author declares that God is above all that can be imagined or desired by men, etc. (Book III., chap. xxii.). These words are well worth reading, and may give us, as they gave to Dame Gertrude, a better knowledge than we might otherwise obtain of what God is, in Whom our happiness consists, and towards Whom we ought ever to aspire in this life. As this passage was constantly in Dame Gertrude's mind, so also was it most profitable to her; for it taught her to tend infinitely towards God, and prevented her from halting in any created thing. By this means she avoided illusions and perils which are incurred only by resting in created things, or in things inferior to God Himself, Who is infinitely above all. Hence there can never be rest in this life, but a constant further tendence toward God. This Dame Gertrude well understood. Moreover, Dame Gertrude acquired knowledge of herself, which is much to the credit of so young a maiden, though doubtless she was also aided from above.

Though both nature and faith teach us self-knowledge, our light is so obscure that unless further illumination is given us from above, we abide in a mist. Dame Gertrude's knowledge was not merely speculative: it was also experimental—a knowledge which is much clearer than the former. It was also habitual, and not merely transitory, as is the knowledge derived from considerations.

Knowing God thus, Dame Gertrude must also have known herself and all creatures, that they were nothing of themselves, but were wholly dependent on the one absolute Being—that is, on God. Such knowledge is the only ground and cause of true humility and of all

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Divine virtues. Anyone intimate with Dame Gertrude, or attentively perusing her writings, would at once see that she had a knowledge of God beyond what she could have acquired by natural abilities or education.

As to Dame Gertrude's other virtues, I will refer the reader to her writings, especially her "Confessions," wherein her virtues shine forth so unmistakably that no explanation or commentary is needed. Indeed, even if no attempt had been made to write her life, her virtue, spirit, and the quality of her exercises would have been sufficiently disclosed in her "Confessions" to give abundant edification to others, and honour for herself and to God by means of her.

CHAPTER XX

DAME GERTRUDE'S MANNER OF PRAYER AT THIS TIME

THE noble propensity, of which I have spoken at such length, urges the soul to seek after God interiorly, and consequently to pursue two things. Firstly, it moves her to seek simplicity of soul, a denudation of all created images, which alone renders her capable of immediate union with the Divine simplicity. Secondly, the propensity urges the soul to seek after the simplicity of the pure Divinity, abstracted from all bodies or created images. Hence the soul will not admit of any discourse, for this must consist of sensible images; or if she does admit of it, she esteems it as a stepping-stone only, and will not tarry there, but pass by means of it to the Divinity, which is void of image. Indeed, the propensity will not allow the soul to rest in even the noblest image that has ever been created, the image of the humanity of our Blessed Saviour. For the soul (in some cases), through her strong propensity, is unable to use the image of the humanity of our Saviour at all as a step to the Divine simplicity. This was the case with Dame Gertrude. In other cases we find the image used only in time of necessity to attain to the Divine sim-

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plicity. This is why souls with a strong propensity do not always relish or abide in meditation on the humanity of our Saviour, or pursue prayer to the Saints, or the actual remembrance of the dead, or other specific exercises which necessarily involve the use of corporal images. A soul, therefore, that has reached a spiritual state by the exercise of simplicity, even though she should require the aid of one of the aforesaid exercises at the beginning of her prayer, will not tarry in the exercise, but will speedily surmount the images evoked, and enter into the simple Divinity. This the soul accomplishes by virtue of her propensity, which ever urges her to seek the Divine simplicity as the object of her repose and happiness. Though in our Saviour the Divinity was united to a body, it is in truth a distinct thing; the Divinity of our Lord is what the soul aspires to, and to which the propensity ever urges her. Our Blessed Saviour intimates as much in these words: "*If I do not go, the Paraclete will not come to you*" (John xvi. 7). The "I" was His corporal humanity; the "Paraclete" was the simple Divinity, which could not be perfectly possessed and enjoyed till the corporal image was removed. "Like covets like," says the philosopher, and so the spiritual soul of man, the seat of the propensity, thirsts after the noblest and most perfect of its kind, the Divine Spirit. He being infinite, the finite spirit of man may satiate and fill itself with Him and in Him, in a way it cannot with other things, because the latter are limited and finite, so that the soul is soon wearied of them. Besides, things of another kind or nature are not the proper food and pasture of a spirit. Thus the Divinity is the infinite, profound centre or resting-place

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of man's soul, to whom all other things, especially sensible things, are narrow and unsuitable.

The Divinity, moreover, is the proper, vast element, wherein the soul should find life, and an infinite life. But when out of this element, the soul is like a whale that has been stranded in a brook: the great creature has not space enough to swim or plunge in its waters. Hence it ever desires the ocean, which, for its depth and wideness, is capable of containing it and millions of others. Here these huge creatures find no bottom, but can swim in all fullness, and enjoy security from danger; for here they are in their element and, as it were, in their own kingdom. Thus does the contemplative soul, in virtue of her propensity, ever aspire to her centre and proper element, the simple Divinity. She rests not in creatures, nor in their images, for they are not her element nor her proper centre. She thirsts after the spaciousness and infinity of God, wherein alone she can have her fill and be secure from all perils. Nothing can touch or harm a soul while she is immersed in the Divinity. Thus one may observe in Dame Gertrude's writings, both prose and verse, that when she was occupied immediately with the Divinity, she showed herself to be in her proper element, boldly, spaciouly walking, swimming, and, as it were, glutting herself in its immensity. This is hinted at in some of her verses, of which the following is an example:

I desire no tongue nor pen
But to extol His praise ;
In which excess I'll melt away
Ten thousand ways.

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If we would die unto ourselves,
And all things else but Thee,
It would be natural to our souls,
For to ascend and be

United to our Centre dear,
To which our souls would hie,
Being as proper then to us
As fire to upwards fly.

Oh ! let us therefore love my God,
For love pertains to Him ;
And let our souls seek nothing else
But in this love to swim ;

Till we, absorbed by His sweet love,
Return from Whom we came,
Where we shall melt into that love
Which joyeth me to name.

Farther on she says :

Oh ! let me, as the silver streams
That unto the ocean glide,
Be drawn into that sea of love
Which into Thee doth slide.

When Dame Gertrude treats of created things, however noble, as the humanity of our Lord apart from His Divinity, or any of the Saints, you will at once feel how she is straitened and cold in comparison with her language when speaking of the pure Divinity, towards which the propensity ever impels the soul as to her proper centre and resting-place. Nevertheless, at first, till God calls the soul to treat immediately with the Divinity, she must be content to abide, as a necessary preparation, in some kind of use of corporal images ; otherwise she will spoil everything, and never attain

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rightly to the exercises of the pure Divinity in which contemplation consists. Dame Gertrude's exercises, therefore, were necessarily at first accompanied with the use of corporal images, though not quite in the way they are used by those who discourse formally or use immediate acts, but in another manner. For how could she think of love, or of God, or of anything else but by means of sensible images? But once come to contemplation, there is no use for images, because the exercise consists only of a blind motion of the will, without reasons or discourse, in virtue of an habitual impulse from the propensity, aided by grace.

The prayer which I called *sensible affections* must not be confounded with what is termed *sensible devotion*. The difference is implied by Dame Gertrude, who wrote in her "Confessions": "Although I found little of that which is called sensible devotion," etc. And more than once she told me she was little acquainted experimentally with sensible devotion. The difference between sensible affections and sensible devotion lies in this—that the latter is wholly confined to the sensible nature, and the intellective soul is, as it were, drowned in it, so that she is little, if at all, spiritually enlightened as regards herself, but is rather wholly darkened. But Dame Gertrude made but a brief halt in her sensible nature, which having produced a little devotion towards God after its fashion, she presently was carried up into the intellective soul, in which the rest of her recollection was exercised without further use of her sensible nature. The latter provided her with a step merely whereby to ascend into the spirit to which she was drawn by her propensity; for the propensity which is in the in-

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tellective soul ever draws us towards itself. The soul, by this means being recollected in her powers, can somewhat clearly discern herself—that is, her intellective soul, with its inordinate inclinations—and God also. But those who are plunged in sensible devotion do not perceive the secret inordinate affections of their soul; nor do they receive light for it, or get out of their inferior nature into the spirit, but remain in darkness, sunk in their sensible nature, and do not become truly spiritual or contemplative. Nor can they by their sensible devotion become perfectly mortified or reformed in their inferior nature.

When Dame Gertrude had attained to habitual contemplation, her spiritual devotion appears to have descended, or rather imparted itself to her sensible nature, which was easily moved to love; thus both spirit and sensible affection united in the exercise, each in its own way, the superior soul retaining the mastery; so that, far from being darkened by her sensible nature, she was rather helped thereby into the height of the spirit, her inferior nature concurring in the action of the spirit. Such is the condition of all contemplative souls when once they have attained to habitual contemplation, their sensible nature not impeding, but rather intensifying, the elevation of the spirit. The root of all this is the interior propensity, which ever draws the soul to the interior of the spirit, seeking to give it the dominion.

As for the others, they are either without the propensity or do not avail themselves of it, but tarry in their exercise of sensible devotion. Hence they remain beneath in their sensible nature, and do not attain to the true and complete exercise of the spirit; nor, consequently,

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to its effects—the mortification of the inordinate natural affections. But those who have an interior propensity and make use of it in time subdue their inordinate affections, and their sensible nature is subjected to the guidance of the spirit. Vocal prayer and other corporal exercises used during actual contemplation often help to elevate the soul higher in contemplation than would be possible without them. Hence, in such cases the spirit impels the body to exercise its devotion by tongue or other member, and thus increases the facility, heartiness, and pleasure with which it prays.

It would be well, perhaps, to unfold here a little more fully Dame Gertrude's first steps in prayer.

First, it will be remembered that she could not discourse or otherwise raise her affections by revolving images or considerations in her mind, on account of her propensity or some other secret cause.

And, secondly, as she was of an affectionate disposition, she was easily moved to love when any suitable matter was set before her. This she expresses in the following lines :

And where so ere this word is writ,
It yields a silver sound ;
But if that word I miss in it,
Methinks I want my ground.

Nothing so simple can be penn'd
If it but treat of love,
But that it serveth in some sort
My sadness to remove.

The transference of her affections, which before had been largely centred on herself and creatures, wholly to God is thus expressed in the following verses :

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And shall my soul by senseless love,
Which yet is never true,
Bestow more love where it is lost
Than where 'tis only due?

No, no, my God ! but rather let
Such folly be to me
A means to urge my sinful soul
To love more fervently.

I said just now that Dame Gertrude was easily moved to love. Let me illustrate this by an example. Let us suppose that she wished to reflect upon these words addressed to God: "O most amiable Beauty, and only desired Good." Such words would usually suffice at once to move her affection. Indeed, the mere mention of love was often enough, like the sound of the word *drink* to a man parched with thirst increases his desire to drink. Thus, when reflecting on such words as these, which I quote from Dame Gertrude's own writings, "O Love, Love, Love! when shall my soul be swallowed up in Thee, that I may neither see, hear, nor taste anything but my God Himself, Who is my Hope and Mercy?" she was apt to be moved with love. Thereupon (supposing it to be the time of recollection) she would break into acts of internal love, sometimes vocally, and elevate her will towards God. But this aptitude must be understood to be only at such times when her body was not indisposed for it, and with the help of those affections she had collected from various authors or had framed for herself.

Then, thirdly, the manner in which Dame Gertrude used these affections was this: She read over and reflected upon the affections, and presently and easily

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her sensible affections were moved. But the motion did not stop there, but was instantly carried up into the superior soul, in virtue of her propensity, which lay therein, and ever draws towards itself and into God. The affection having arrived there, the superior soul, as it were, fed itself therewith towards God, and remained in God, and in the feeding and enjoyment as long as the virtue of the motion lasted, which was only for a very short time. This ended, she would again turn to her book and take another affection, or one that might present itself to her mind, and act as before. Thus she continued, taking new affections as often as required, till the time of her recollection was all spent.

Such was Dame Gertrude's practice of prayer, and it produced a recollection of soul and a capacity for internal light, which served her for all that concerned her good. It was an exercise that neither Dame Gertrude nor I called sensible devotion, as generally understood, because she never remained plunged in sensible devotion, but was carried into devotion of the intellectual soul, and this exercise is spiritual, and not sensible or corporal. After long practice in this exercise, and in virtue of it, her superior soul came to be habitually well affected towards God, so that she needed no longer her collection of sensible affections. She was able to exercise her superior soul with the affection proper to it and immediately, without any sensible affections. This state is true contemplation, for it is a prompt, easy, clear, immediate converse of the intellectual soul with the Divinity, apprehended solely according to the notion of faith. Here the propensity held the mastery and dominion over all corporal images ;

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whereas before its dominion was imperfect through the excess of inordinate affections, which cause troublesome corporal images (or distractions), so that it was, as it were, kept under hatches in a kind of restraint, and could not work with that liberty, facility, and scope it enjoyed now that the said impediments were removed. It was ever one and the same propensity, but has now acquired more strength than formerly. Her propensity, or its new strength and vitality, she thus signifies in the following lines :

No stag in chase so thirsty is,
Or greedy of sweet spring,
As is my soul of Thee, my God,
While sighing here I sing.

Dame Gertrude in her writings, speaking perhaps from experience, shows what courage a soul who would pursue a contemplative course must have on account of the difficulties and opposition she is likely to find within herself and from without. You have heard what difficulties Dame Gertrude encountered in finding the way and keeping to it—I mean temptations that sought to draw her into the state of nature. Similar difficulties are met by all who would pursue this way. What chiefly supports them is the propensity, aided by the grace of God. They may get some encouragement from without by the concurrence of other souls pursuing the same course—a help which Dame Gertrude obtained. Thus, united in one Divine Spirit, and being, as the Scripture says, of one heart and one mind, these souls help and sustain one another, the weaker in propensity strengthened and comforted by the stronger. “*It is better,*” says Ecclesiastes (chap. iv.), “*that two*

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should be together than one, for they have the advantage of their society ; if one fall, he shall be supported by the other. Woe to him that is alone ! for when he falleth, he hath none to lift him up. And if two lie together they shall warm one another : how shall one be warmed ? And if a man prevail against one, two shall withstand him : a threefold cord is not easily broken” (Eccli. iv. 8-12).

Though some persons may regard such conduct as factious or faulty, it was not so, but was founded in the “bond of charity.” Scarcely ever is such a bond to be found among the votaries of other ways. Their senses and sentences are as diverse as their persons. Indeed, had not Dame Gertrude had the company and encouragement of her director, it would have been much harder for her and her Sisters to have held on from first to last in the face of all the opposition that there has been. But God, Who began, has also consummated His work. Indeed, Dame Gertrude herself was a great encouragement to the others. In this case was verified what is said in the Acts of the Apostles, that the work which was of God shall not be destroyed by man. All the machinations of men or devils cannot prevail against a course established by God and tending towards Him. The beginning, progress, and consummation, therefore, is to be attributed solely to the Divine disposition and working, and not to any human creature.

CHAPTER XXI

DAME GERTRUDE ATTAINS TO CONTEMPLATION BY THE WAY OF LOVE

WE have seen from Dame Gertrude's own writings that she felt her immediate spiritual Superior did not understand her aright. There was one point particularly to which this observation applies, and upon which Dame Gertrude remarked more than once to me, and that was concerning prayer. Her Superior, perceiving how much she was engaged in external affairs and conversations, advised her to give a longer time to mental prayer. But Dame Gertrude saw plainly that she could not do more than she did already; nor could she forestall the hour, especially in the afternoon. She was able to pray best, as it were, by spirts, with a pause between—partly because she could not digest much at a time, and still more on account of the weakness of her head, which would have suffered if she had acted otherwise than she did.

Proceeding in this manner, Dame Gertrude obtained clear, easy, efficacious recollections, which fully satisfied her soul. Moreover, she saw that it was God's will that she should act in this manner. To have forced herself to longer prayer out of her own head, or at

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the instigation of another, would have frustrated the Divine working in her and by her, and have destroyed her head and health and ruined her spirit. She therefore did not alter her conduct in this and in some other matters upon the advice of her Superior—an advice which proceeded only from his own imagination, and was not warranted by any inquiries made of her. Long and daily experience had taught Dame Gertrude what, how, and how long she might profitably pray; and this she learnt chiefly or only by observing the Divine light, will, or call, which in time grew to be so familiar that more than once in conversation with me she expressed approval of the saying of Tauler: "It is as easy for an interior soul to discern Divine calls as it is to distinguish the right hand from the left," or, as Dame Gertrude herself expressed it, "the sun from the moon."¹ The truth of these sayings, and the sense in which they should be taken, will be unfolded hereafter.

The prayer with which Dame Gertrude began her course, as we have seen, was the prayer of sensible affections. In this she continued until she attained to prayer in spirit, which is contemplation. In substance there is no difference between the prayer of one soul and another, when they have arrived at contemplation; for the working of all contemplatives is spiritual, as proceeding from the same cause or ground, the afore-said propensity (aided by grace), which works in and by the will, elevating and directing it towards God. This much is common to all contemplative souls. The difference lies in the intensity or greatness of the impulse, and partly in the height of the elevation,

¹ "Apology."

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and remoteness from sense and corporal nature. These qualities will depend on the progress the soul has made in spirit, the time and industry she has given to the matter, the greatness of the propensity, and the measure of grace received for it. All these circumstances considered, it is very probable that Dame Gertrude arrived soon at contemplation, though I am not certain how soon ; for her director was not curious on the point, nor had she any doubt or reason to speak to him about it. Still, she would say sometimes that her prayer was such that she could not well express it, especially to those who were inexperienced, and that was a sign that her prayer was contemplation. For contemplative prayer, being spiritual, is not easily explicable ; but inferior forms of prayer, being executed in sense, are easier expressed by sense and language.

That Dame Gertrude arrived at contemplation, and arrived soon, seems to be demonstrated also by her writings. But whether she was still subject to the obscurities to which she so often alludes in her writings, I cannot tell. It may be that she was, for she may have been unable at first to get fully out of the natural quality of her disposition, which is the root and cause of such obscurities. But in souls that have come to the state of perfection (which is not till after a passive contemplation) desolations and obscurities do not proceed from a natural cause or the quality of their disposition, for they habitually dwell in a state above the ordinary condition of nature ; but the obscurities proceed from a more supernatural cause, by the special working of God, at such times and in the manner which He sees will conduce to the humiliation and good of

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the soul. Indeed, it is recognized as a principle among divines that grace does not destroy nature, but rather accommodates its operations to the natural qualities of the individual, in so far as they are good. And of themselves they are good: what is evil in them has come from the corruption of mankind through sin, since he fell from the state of original justice. Grace, then, tends to remove what is deordinate and corrupt in our nature, and leaves the good still in it; yea, even works upon it and increases it.

The spiritual exercises of Dame Gertrude, therefore, did not tend to diminish her affection towards God and creatures, for in itself it was natural and good; but the exercises conduced to remove what was inordinate, or savoured of self-love and self-seeking, and to cause her affection to intend God more purely, and wholly to apply itself towards Him. Hence, when her exercises had grown more spiritual, grace was able to make good use of the affection of her disposition, and brought it to concur in her exercise towards God, the intention of nature being purified and accommodated to the intention of the Holy Spirit, which was directed towards God for Himself. Thus, grace aiding and directing the propensity, moves and teaches the soul in all her acts to intend God purely for Himself, though intending at the same time her happiness with Him.

Although Dame Gertrude's spirituality somewhat allayed the activity of her imagination and other senses, it did not destroy them, but reduced them to good order by applying them towards the spiritual and true love of God, so that it might be said of her: "*He hath set in order charity in me*" (Cant. ii. 4). Hence it will be seen

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that when Dame Gertrude had attained to contemplation, her affectionate nature and the activity of her imagination or other senses still remained, but were brought into subjection to the spirit, and made to serve it in due order.

We have seen that Dame Gertrude was full of literary work of various kinds and in other ways busied her mind—clear proofs of her activity. But most other contemplative souls are not nearly so active as she was, either before or after she attained to contemplation. Her writings (all of which were indited after she attained to contemplation) are full of natural, sensible affections towards God ; and so likewise were her talks and words with others. But her affections were now more rectified and full of grace. Her affectionate disposition is thus alluded to in some verses written by her in her latter days :

For since I am not where I love,
How can I comfort find,
But only in the song of love,
By love to me assigned ?

And where so ere this word is writ,
It yields a silver sound ;
But if that word I miss in it,
Methinks I want my ground.

By this it will be understood why Dame Gertrude so often says in her writings that her way to God was and must be by love, and that she in no way relished, but, on account of her nature and the quality of her spirit, abhorred an opposite course, which, as she conceived, would draw her into a kind of servile fear that would utterly deject her spirit, and there bury it. In fine,

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she believed that any other course would have made her deeply subject to all the miseries of her nature, as she had sufficiently experienced, and would have undermined her health, which, God knows, at best was the least that sufficed for the needs of her spirit and the service of God.

Besides, in itself and of its own nature love is a nobler and more suitable passion for the perfect love of God than fear, which implies much less familiarity with, and even a certain distance from, God. Women, too, of their own nature are over-fearful and affectionate. Hence the passion of love, speaking of women generally, should be promoted, and the passion of fear mortified and restrained rather than increased.

Nothing but the exercise of love had Dame Gertrude to raise herself out of the miserable condition of nature wherein she was formerly plunged and almost buried. In particular no kind of fear could bring her out of her trouble, but rather fear plunged her more deeply into it, putting out the eyes of her intellective soul, and utterly depressing her will, so that both understanding and will had been utterly dejected. Her way, therefore, was to be solely by love, and not by fear, as she declared in the following letter she addressed to me: "I must do that which I am able to do for love and not from fear. You know upon what terms you found me. Verily, I was out of hope of ever seeing merry days, and have lain many a night wishing myself here or there, in some other place, or that I had never been born. This was partly out of the scrupulous humour I was in, and partly because I wanted instructions, which I had been very diligent to seek of all the men that came hither

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and by all the books I could lay hands on, and thus would it be again if I gave way to that which would draw me into dejection and fear. And though some alleged disobedience from your instructions, I can draw no such thing out of them, but find that you exact as much, if not more, than others. Some allege that we are singular and condemn others, but I think no instructions can draw one to a more sincere love and respect to all men than you do, if they be rightly understood." Dame Gertrude concludes the letter with these words: "And now, if our Fathers can determine anything, it will be done, for we honour and respect them with sincere hearts, and bless the day that we ever see them."

I know that Dame Gertrude feared hell—none abhorred it more than she did—but to think on it, however good her purpose, would have been more likely (considering her nature and disposition) to send her to hell than to deliver her from the danger of it. The same may be said of the consideration of death, judgment, and other matters calculated to excite fear. The consideration of all such matters was more harmful than beneficial to her. For all these reasons Dame Gertrude could say most truly that her way to God was the way of love, and not of fear.

As Dame Gertrude held that the way of fear tended to multiplicity and dejection of spirit, she composed a sort of Litany in homely verse as a preservative against such evil:

From multiplicity and dejection,
That would breed our soul's confusion,
Defend us Lord, with Thy benediction.

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The multiplicity here referred to was indeed matter that in itself was good, and even necessary for souls not tending to contemplation. But for contemplatives such doctrine is improper and a hindrance to the simplicity they seek after, and is too restrictive of that liberty of spirit which is so necessary for contemplation. Hence St. Paul says that where the Spirit of our Lord is working in the soul there is, and must be, liberty, so that the Spirit may work freely. And the Spirit is not free to work till the soul be delivered from multiplicity, and so become simple; then she has perfect liberty and is able to work towards God in perfection. Contemplatives well discern what tends to simplicity; and what does not tend to simplicity is multiplicity.

As for other souls that are not actually tending to simplicity, they (though perhaps both learned and devout) do not well discern the multiplicity which is contained in matter that is very good; they admire such writings and willingly embrace what they teach, and with good reason. But contemplatives as much abhor such doctrine for their own use as the former value it. Active souls, on the other hand, equally detest for their own practice what suits contemplatives, and with as much reason.

Dame Gertrude in many places¹ speaks of a *riddance*, which is nothing but freeing the soul from multiplicity and other impediments. Riddance, she says, is so absolutely necessary that, unless the director inculcates it and helps the disciple to obtain it, in vain is all the rest he can do for the soul as regards attaining to contemplation. The co-operation of the director consists

¹ "Apology."

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in promoting the aforesaid liberty of spirit declared by St. Paul to be necessary in the passage just quoted and in the following, where he says: "*If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law*" (Gal. v. 18). Indeed, for spiritual tendence towards God nothing helps so much to acquire simplicity as the doctrine of riddance. Nor is any advice more perilous than to counsel the soul to use matter that involves multiplicity, or to impose on her anything more than is already enforced by nature or in other ways. When the soul has come to the aforesaid simplicity and liberated from all multiplicity, then is she in the proper and immediate disposition for union with the Divine simplicity, which is the consummation of all our exercises. The happiness of this life consists in such union as may be had in this life; the happiness of the future lies in the union which is proper to that life, and is the perfect, consummate, and supreme happiness of the soul.

All contemplatives should tend towards happiness in this life¹ (even though they may not attain to it) by means of simplicity, which they and their director are to procure by all possible lawful means, abhorring as impediments all multiplicity and the occasions thereof.

But to return to Dame Gertrude's way of life, from which I have strayed. When she came to see and know herself by means of her spiritual course, she endeavoured by love, like another Mary Magdalen, or like her patron, St. Augustine, to purge her soul from the guilt of former sins, for which she now felt great sorrow. She had, like all others, a twofold love—the

¹ According to the degree of happiness attained here, so will be the happiness of the future life, for there are degrees of union both here and there.

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love of the intellective soul and the love of the sensible soul. Her love in the former was expressed by resignation and conformity of her will with the Divine will. This conformity, among other things, implies an aversion from all manner of sin. Love in her sensible soul was that natural, sensible affection which is felt in our corporal nature. Now, both these loves regarded God for Himself, or it would not have been true love. There is no true love in sensible affection save in so far as it descends from a true love in the superior soul. Of this kind was Dame Gertrude's sensible love, after she had arrived at contemplation, the latter purifying her spiritual love and rectifying her sensible affection, which before was not turned to God, but rather to itself.

Dame Gertrude had also a sorrow both spiritual and sensible, but it was a sorrow proceeding from love, and that a true love; whereas a sorrow proceeding from an unrectified love is not from a true love of God, but from love of self.

In St. Mary Magdalen both these loves were rectified. By the love of the superior soul she contemplated the Divinity, and her will became conformed to the Divine will. By the love of her sensible nature she shed those abundant tears, and displayed other tokens of love towards the sacred humanity of our Saviour, Who thereupon said that much was forgiven her because of her great love. Such love regards both God and the sins, but God more than the sins; or rather the regard that the Saint had of her sins was in God, Who was considered as the end of all, and the sorrow she had for her sins was for the love of God. St. Augustine also had both these loves in perfection. The love of his superior soul may be inferred from the height of his contemplations, and

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the rectified love of his sensible nature is abundantly disclosed in his writings, and especially at his death, when he shed many tears during the recital of the seven penitential Psalms. This sorrow was the sorrow of love, and not the sorrow of servile fear, or other sorrow founded in self-love.

Dame Gertrude was easily moved to tears. Still, after she arrived at contemplation, she restrained herself, I think, as much as was possible, lest she should injure her health and head, which were already very weak.

It is well here to call to mind that sensible love which in contemplatives descends from the spirit, whether it takes the form of tears or other corporal motion, does not obscure the superior soul, nor hinder its light, but rather promotes its affections; whereas the sensible love of others, though in a manner directed towards God, rather darkens the superior soul than enlightens it, because the spirit is, as it were, drowned in their sensible nature, as though they consisted only or chiefly of corporal nature, without spirit, or life, or affection of spirit. But the love of contemplatives, which I called true love, comprises all the passions rectified, as sorrow, fear, hope, and the rest. Love is the noblest and the predominant passion, and is the true end of all the rest, for all of them intend love as their final end and exercise; so love comprises all. This is indicated in the following lines of Dame Gertrude, in which she assumes the attitude of a penitent sinner :

I fled from Thee by many sins,
And Thou didst follow me,
As if my ruin would have caus'd
Some detriment to Thee.

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How can this choose but wound my heart,
When I remember it,
And ever serve to humble me,
While at Thy feet I sit ?

From whence, my Lord, my God and All,
Permit me not to rise,
Till I do love Thee as Thou wouldst,
The which doth all comprise.

Dame Gertrude being interiorly converted (which was not perfectly accomplished till she entered her spiritual course), had a clear perception of the excesses of her former life, and particularly since she entered religion ; and very feelingly she bewailed them, moved by love both in spirit and in sense, as may well be seen in many passages, of which the following is an example:

For if they do return to Thee,
Thy heart Thou wilt not close,
As witness can my wretched soul,
Which was so like to lose

All grace and goodness (if Thou hadst
Not me with help prevented),
By sins that would with bloody tears
Be while I live lamented.

Another reason why Dame Gertrude's course was the way of love arose from her propensity. Her propensity always drew her to an immediate regard of God, and finally to regard God for Himself, which is the truth and perfection of love. Her propensity would not permit her to entertain thoughts of fear or other inferior considerations, but it led her to the simplicity of God Himself. For the consideration of created things could not be the love of God, because they were

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but created things, and the regard of them would have been in reference to herself, and for her own sake, and not principally for God ; so they could not be the true love of God, but rather an exercise of self-love, though with a kind of relation to God.¹

Hence it may be seen that Dame Gertrude's way to God was by love, and for two causes. The one was on account of her affectionate disposition, which was more suited to the exercise of love than to any other passion, for no thoughts could move her towards God so efficaciously as those of love. The other cause was the afore-said propensity (seated in the will of the intellective soul), which ever draws the soul more and more into God and to His love, which daily increases during life, if the propensity be duly exercised.

Dame Gertrude was very zealous in promoting internal ways for such as were capable of them. She walked in them herself, and judged them to be of the best, though she commended also other good ways as right and profitable for those for whom they were proper. Indeed, she spoke so well of these ways and so humbly of her own that in one place she writes thus : " Those who through the gift and grace of God have found and lead an internal life will not condemn, much less contemn, those who speak against it, but will humble themselves in all things, knowing that others who live extroverted

¹ It may be well to note that by *true* love of God Father Baker must be understood to mean *perfect* love of God. Inferior considerations are quite compatible with a true love of God, but perfect love of God causes us to love God for His own sake, without direct advertence to inferior considerations. Cf. "Contemplative Prayer," Book iii., chap. x., pp. 287, 288.

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lives may be more pleasing to God than they, and that for many reasons which they may easily conceive, which yet do not hinder them (at least, ought not) from prosecuting the happy way they are in.”¹

Dame Gertrude had an excellent judgment for discerning what books and matters best help souls towards contemplation, what tends to produce simplicity in souls, or what multiplicity was a decided impediment to contemplation. Judgment she might well have from experience and by leading an interior life herself, whereby she could easily discern what tended to simplicity and what to multiplicity in herself, and thus in other souls.

For her own part (and the same may be said for all other contemplatives), Dame Gertrude had no relish for books, sermons, or instructions that tie souls down to certain practices that are of themselves indifferent, and might lawfully (in themselves) be omitted. She would have contemplatives left to their own call concerning such things. Hence, the books and instructions that suited her best were those that in general exhorted and taught souls to observe their call from God about indifferent things. As to the practices that each individual soul should take up, none could teach her that. The soul herself must observe what is her call from God.

There are few books or preachers, unfortunately, that encourage or commend the observation of Divine calls, but either they omit to speak of them altogether or give instructions which hinder them—instructions tending to multiplicity rather than simplicity. Hence neither Dame Gertrude nor her Sisters took much notice

¹ “Apology.”

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of such books, and still less of sermons. But if they lighted upon anything in a book that tended to an interior life, or to simplicity (which is the same thing), they would take note of it and embrace it, leaving other things alone as not concerning them. Indeed, nothing disgusts a contemplative soul more than to hear exhortations and sayings that would limit or tie the soul down, or urge her overmuch to things not of obligation, and without regard to what the spirit relishes or has a call or inspiration for, be it concerning the matter or manner of prayer, or any other kind of exercise.

It will now be understood what I meant when I spoke of contemplative and interior souls finding and enjoying God in the interior. I meant a certain retirement of the soul from the trouble and mist caused by sensible images, and the giving of herself to an immediate, clear, quiet converse with God, and actuation towards Him. All this is done in contemplation. God is there found and enjoyed in the best manner that ordinarily is possible for the powers of man's soul, aided by grace in this life. This was Dame Gertrude's ordinary manner of finding and possessing God. The extraordinary way is more rare and supernatural, consisting of the inaction of God upon the soul as patient. Of the former state Dame Gertrude writes thus :

My soul, where is thy love and Lord,

Seeing Him thou canst not find ?

Oh, cheer up, heart, be comforted !

For He is in thy mind.

To Him relation one may have

As often as one goes

Into the closet of the heart,

One's griefs there to disclose.

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All men have God within them, for, as St. Paul says, "*In Him we live and move and have our being*" (Acts xvii. 28). But all do not find Him or enjoy Him after the manner of Dame Gertrude and other contemplatives. Other souls enjoy God by grace, in common with all who are in a state of grace. But contemplatives find and enjoy God in a less misty and confused manner than others, who are much darkened and confused interiorly by the presence and annoyance of sensible images.

There is still another finding of God in the interior, to which I have more than once alluded, that is far more sublime than ordinary contemplation. It is supernatural, and above the ordinary ability of man to attain to, for it depends upon the free-will of God. All that man is able to do in it is to work towards it, and to dispose himself for it. It is the inaction of God to which I refer, and is usually called a passive contemplation, wherein God discovers Himself in a clearer manner than He does by the light of faith only, the sight vouchsafed in ordinary contemplation. Here God manifests Himself by a certain special created species, of which I can say no more, being a matter that passes my skill, and of which I am unworthy to treat.

One principal sign of the truth of these internal matters, when called in question, is the confidence of the accused person's conscience, provided he is pursuing an interior life and the exercises belonging to it—namely, serious daily recollections, and, on the other hand, the diffidence, or at least but slight confidence, on the part of the accuser. It is impossible but that an interior soul will discover the falsity of his interior life (if so it be) in course of time, especially if he be driven to look

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into himself by occasion of external objections raised against his way of life. He must at least have a doubt or just fear, and so no confidence. Hence he will be very loath to face a public and exact inquiry by Superiors or other lawful judges, and, being in doubt, he will probably use all the evasion he can. "*Everyone*," says the Gospel, "*that doth ill hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be found fault with*" (John iii. 20). But where he is ready and courageous (yet in the fear of the Lord) to come into publicity and to have the innermost recesses of his heart discovered and judged, and sees nothing in his conscience that he need be afraid or ashamed of, or that others can justly reprehend, this is a strong argument and token of the truth of his life. As the same Gospel says, "*He that doth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be manifest because they are done in God*" (v. 21).

Such was the condition of Dame Gertrude and her Sisters. They knew best the character and quality of their interior life; they had the best means of knowing it. They were ready with a certain alacrity to have their interior life brought into the open, and they felt a kind of confidence which precluded the possibility of falsehood or error.

In the testimony of a good conscience, which alone can produce confidence, Dame Gertrude lived and died. Such assurance in her interior could not have been possible if she had not been fully resolved to stand by the judgment and decision of her Superiors as regards both interior and exterior matters. It is true a soul might feel great reluctance to leave a course from

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which she had derived so much benefit (as was the case here), and have no hope of being put into a better one, or one even as good. Still, the obedience due to God, and for Him to His substitutes, and the power of Divine grace which can move a soul (however wilful of herself) to true obedience, are above all. Though the soul at first might have some difficulty in obeying, yet, undergoing a just trial, the grace of God might, and it may be hoped would, soften her heart and render her obedient. God, indeed, often withholds the abundance of His grace even from souls whom He loves most tenderly, till the occasion arises wherein they stand in real need. Oftentimes when He means to deny such graces, He prevents the occasion, so that it may not fall upon the soul. Dame Gertrude more than once cites Tauler's words: "God rewards no works but His own." The meaning whereof is, that God does not reward works (even though good in their own nature) which we do merely out of the impulse of nature, as, for instance, those which we do out of our own heads, and undertake without a Divine call from God.¹ This

¹ Father Baker cannot here mean that no good work has any merit unless we are conscious of an immediate impulse from God bidding us do it ; for a Divine impulse is seldom perceived, except by those who have attained to habitual contemplation, because the latter alone are in a disposition to take note of inspirations. He appears to mean, rather, that our actions are meritorious in so far as they are done in obedience to God, whether God's will is indicated to us by an external call (or command) through Superiors or other channels, or by an internal admonition or impulse. And the more we allow other motives—natural motives—to mingle with this obedience, or even to take its place, the less meritorious will be the action. Hence the Church bids us ask in one of her most

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arises chiefly from the want of purity of intention in our natural actions, for nature always finally intends itself, and not God. But when we set ourselves wholly to follow the Divine call, and abstain from undertakings and interference, save only upon Divine calls and inspirations, then is God the first and only mover of our deeds. Moreover, He not only moves us to them, but He also moves us to intend Him as their end. Thus we are but God's instruments, and He is the beginning, continuation, and end of the work. Thus the work is truly God's work, and therefore worthy of an eternal reward. Whereas our own works, proceeding merely from ourselves, though good in their nature, are yet but natural works (for nature, in all that it does, ever intends its own good and pleasure), and are not meritorious of an eternal reward. Hence the necessity of observing the Divine call, for without it we cannot merit nor procure our salvation.¹ But by her obedience to such Divine motions or calls (whether the calls are immediately from God, or by means of Superiors, law, or other obligation or necessity), the soul merits both grace and glory. Nor will habitual grace or habitual intentions to do all for God cause sufficient purity for merit, because it is nature that principally works in

beautiful prayers: "*Prevent*, we beseech Thee, O Lord, our actions *by Thy holy inspirations*, and carry them on by Thy gracious assistance; *that every prayer and work of ours may always be begun by Thee*, and by Thee be happily ended"; that is, do Thou forestall our natural impulses by the grace of Thy inspirations, that every prayer and work of ours may be begun and proceed from Thy impulse and command.

¹ See previous note.

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those deeds of ours, as God well sees. Our intentions, therefore, need to be actually or virtually done for God. This can be only when we perform our actions in obedience to His will or call, and for His will or call. Acting thus, we eject self-ends, or those ends which I called natural ends.

The practice of such obedience to Divine calls cannot truly exist without the serious pursuit of recollections, a competent degree of abstraction, which consists in not meddling with things further than God demands of us, and other practices of mortification already alluded to, and which sufficed to enable Dame Gertrude (as other souls) to follow her call from God. Let, then, those who have entertained distrust of the practice of attending to Divine calls put aside their fears, and extol and promote with all their industry what conduces so much to salvation for themselves and others.

Furthermore, the works which God directs us to undertake are commonly brought by Him to a successful termination, according to the words spoken by His prophet (Isa. lv. 11): "*My word which shall go forth from My mouth shall not return to Me void, but it shall do whatsoever I please, and shall prosper in the things for which I sent it.*" Thus, even by God's own promise, things undertaken at His word (besides the merit thereof) shall prosper and come to their proposed end. Surely the reason why works undertaken by Churchmen and religious so often fail is not improbably because such works were not assumed or prosecuted under Divine inspiration or call, but upon some natural impulse or human end, which they did not discern, because they were not leading a life which would enable

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them to distinguish between a Divine call and a natural impulse.

But, on the other hand, works which we undertake and pursue out of a Divine motive and intention God promotes, provided we do not abandon our intention for natural or self-seeking ends. But when we undertake things out of our own head (which is the impulse of nature working in us), God leaves us to our own natural abilities, which often fail us for want of knowledge or other defect, and so are unable to carry out our purpose. In place of success, we reap oftentimes sorrow, confusion, and shame.

It is otherwise, however, as I said, when we act upon a Divine impulse. God's impulse is omnipotent in itself, and is able to render us, as it were, omnipotent as His instrument. Hence we should meddle with nothing but what God directs us into by His internal or external call, performing all only as from Him and by His will, and then our deeds will be full of grace and meritorious, and will in all likelihood obtain their desired effect in this life.

Those who follow the practice of Divine calls do not often engage in many works and much business, as others do; but, because they undertake little, they merit much by their work, and they commonly bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. Of such the Wise Man may have spoken when he said: "*He that is less in action shall receive wisdom*" (Ecclus. xxxviii. 25). He that is in few distractions is better able to discern Divine calls and put them into practice. Certainly, few undertakings are more likely to be brought to a conclusion than many, according to the saying: "The

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more things we are intent upon, the less attention is given to each."¹

From what I have said, it will be understood that all works, whether great or little, that proceed from the Divine impulse are, as it were, Divine; other actions are but human. Even the abstraction, silence, and solitude of observers of Divine calls, being done in obedience to the Divine impulse, are likewise Divine works; whereas the deeds of others, however great in themselves or in appearance, or however difficult, are but as dross or shams when brought to the touchstone of a Divine test or examination. But the works of true observers of Divine calls, of whom it is to be feared there are but few, are truly golden, as will be manifest when they are applied to the touchstone. Hence the reason of Dame Gertrude's words in her fourth "Confession": "Thy words, O Lord, are works"—that is, when God bids a soul under His guidance to do a thing, and at His word she sets about it, He will give her the ability to carry it through, and so in effect it is His work, and His word proves to be also work. Neither habitual grace nor an habitual intention suffices to render our human, natural deeds truly Divine in the sense already specified. Our deeds must proceed from an actual, or at least virtual, Divine call or impulse, which in practice those only can properly observe who seriously pursue recollection by some kind of mental prayer. In other words, those who do not pursue mental prayer, together with competent abstraction, and freedom from solitudes and unnecessary doings about external matters, are incapable of observing and

¹ "Pluribus intentus minor est ad singula sensus."

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pursuing the Divine light and calls by which the soul is taught what to undertake and what not to meddle with, the end she is to propose to herself—namely, God, and in obedience to Him only and His voice and will. The least works done out of a Divine impulse are of as much merit as the greatest considered in themselves, because they proceed from one motive or cause, and tend to one and the same end—the Divine will and pleasure. Still, there may be circumstances in a work which will render it more meritorious than another, as when we find greater difficulty in it. By overcoming our difficulty and repugnance we acquire greater merit; and this is true in cases of abstaining and suffering, as well as of action.

Moreover, a deed done with greater fervour and purer intention of charity causes the act to be more meritorious, whether the work be great or little in its own nature. Still, such fervour and intention have their root and cause in the Divine impulse, the measure of which the soul cannot exceed.

God sometimes moves a soul under His guidance to enter on a matter which He does not intend to be carried out. This He does for the mortification or other good of the soul, or for the good of others. Still, the intention of God and of the soul herself is truly carried out; for God intended no more than what He enabled the soul to do, and the soul also intended to do no more than what God should enable her to do. Thus the soul proceeded in the matter with resignation and with the desire to do God's will in it, and not her own. Nor will she continue in the work longer than she finds it to be God's will, and is willing to embrace any shame

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or confusion that comes by it, or any difficulty that she may find in it ; for she handles the business as God's work, not as her own : thus she is without self-seeking or affection to it. In this way should all observers of Divine calls act. Thus also did Dame Gertrude behave to the best of her power, as appears from words she uttered on several occasions. For instance, she says that she dared not so much as wish deliberately that anything should happen otherwise than it did. To quote her words : "And when I thought it for the honour of God and the good of the convent, I did not fear any disgrace or difficulty that should happen to me in what I thought fit to be done. What I did out of other intention or natural inclination, I desired that God should purge me for it by any failure in the business He pleased." Was not this a resignation well worthy of one who faithfully followed Divine calls ? "O rara avis in terris," that simply intended God ! Show me another who can say with as good a conscience what you have heard Dame Gertrude say, and I will maintain that he is as happy as she is, and that is very happy. For of whose happiness may we better presume than of a soul so sincerely disposed towards God's love, so zealous for the common good of God's house ?

No wonder that a soul should be so wholly devoted, as was Dame Gertrude, to the observance and pursuit of Divine calls. For to what end, pray, did God call her—or, for the matter of that, calls any soul to religion ? Indeed, for no other end but to be able to attend to the Divine call better than he or she could have done in the world. And shall the soul called into religion for

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the purpose be debarred from it? Hear what Dame Gertrude says on the point in her "Apology": "O religion! O no religion! where the knowledge of Divine calls is, as it were, unknown, unless it be in speculation. Or, perhaps through ignorance, it is persecuted, despised, obscured, derided, banished, sought to be pulled out by the roots, and kept out of the hearts of those that desire it and are capable of it. Surely God will take all this as done to Himself, and revenge it in an extraordinary manner, except where invincible ignorance excuses this proceeding. But as to the verity of this doctrine and the general practice of it, God will never permit the gates of hell to prevail so far against it as to be able to extinguish it, it being the root and cause of all sanctity in His Church; howsoever, He may permit it to be lost out of the hearts of some particular persons through their frailties and the workings of others. O my God, abide with us for ever! Let Thy gracious Spirit instruct us, direct us, and lead us in the way that leadeth to Thee. Of ourselves we are blind, and there is no light within us. Live, reign, and shine Thou to us and in us. Let the cloud of darkness and ignorance be dissipated and brought to nothing."

CHAPTER XXII

DIVINE CALLS THE ROOT AND GROUND OF HOLINESS: A WRITER CRITICIZED

I HAVE said that the excessive natural activity of Dame Gertrude's senses was in the latter part of her life much abated, so that she could better bear to be alone or disengaged; and this not only at the time of her recollection or when making ready for it, but at other times too that were unseasonable for recollection, as shortly after meals. At such times during this period she could abide in solitude, silence, and not-doing; whereas in the earlier part of her life her senses would have been, as it were, mad if they were not actually employed either on some exercise towards God or in conversation with creatures. This arose from the great natural activity of her senses, and the condition of her natural inclinations which lived and reigned in her, and were still unaltered by supernatural influences. These were not yet potent enough to restrain such excesses as were natural in her senses, and which hindered perfect contemplation. Moreover, her senses prevented her from entering deeply into her soul, and thereby into God; nor could she abide long in the height to which she attained, but was quickly brought down again by the strong activity of her senses, which ever sought to draw her soul into them and into their actions.

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But in this latter period of Dame Gertrude's life, through the constant exercise of introversion, the power of her senses became weakened. She was also helped by her sufferings, especially by her internal temptations and trials. Besides, her introversions in time of recollection became more and more profound and internal, her soul being thereby detached, and, as it were, separated from her senses. She was also able to continue for a considerable time in this separation, with an ever deeper and deeper descent, or rather ascent, into herself and her spirit, so that there came to be a certain habitual separation between the soul and the senses. Indeed, her senses grew to be almost stupefied and greatly mortified as regards excessive activity and the power to domineer over her, so that they were well content to rest and do nothing, save in so far as it pleased her soul to call upon them and make use of them. They were then ready at command to give their service, not with precipitation or eagerness, but demurely and with sobriety, as tamed creatures, more subject to the spirit than heretofore. In earlier days they were lords and masters, but now they had come to know themselves and become servants, as bound in reason and justice.

Dame Gertrude was now so habituated to her profound introversions, and her senses were so stupefied and, as it were, weary, that after her recollection she was well content to sit still and do nothing at all, not even to talk to others by way of recreation, but to remain in a certain rest of body and sense. She did not, however, give herself to prayer, as it was not a seasonable time for it.

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I may compare Dame Gertrude's state at such time to a man who has been engaged in much hard labour, and is extremely tired after his work. Such a man is well content to lay himself down and do nothing, neither talking, nor thinking, nor yet sleeping. His bodily weariness sufficiently absorbs the use and activity of his senses for the time. Even so was it with Dame Gertrude. Her recollection over, by reason of her deep introversion therein, her soul and senses were well content to remain idle, not working, nor talking, nor performing any other exercise of body or sense.

After taking such a rest, or with suitable exercise of body and sense, when the hour for another recollection came round, Dame Gertrude could instantly, without seeking any means, introvert herself most profoundly, ever increasing¹ in the depth of her recollection, till the end of the time allotted to prayer. During this state the soul is for the time far removed from the troublesome images of corporal objects, the intellective soul, which is a spirit, being in immediate intercourse with the Divine Spirit.

The root or cause of such introversions is the propensity, aided by grace. Dame Gertrude's propensity could never have permitted her to rest in this life, but would have ever urged her to a further tendence towards God. This is what I meant by saying that her introversions became deeper and deeper. For introversions are nothing else but the elevations of the will caused by an

¹ This increase consists in getting farther and farther out of oneself and more into God. That something which is drawn out of oneself is the most spiritual part of the spirit that lies hid in the very essence of the soul.

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impulse proceeding from the aforesaid propensity, increased and helped by grace. Although the act of elevation may not be caused by any discourse or reasoning, yet oft-times it receives some help from without by way of motive, which causes the elevation to be far more intense than it would have been if the propensity had acted alone. Still, the will in its action does not carry with it the motive, nor any representation of it, but proceeds blindly and bluntly of itself—that is, without further use of the understanding, or of any sensible image. External motives are used by contemplatives chiefly to intensify the elevation of the will, so as to make a higher ascent or to enter deeper into God than would have been possible through their natural propensity and ordinary grace. For example, suppose an interior soul is engaged at her recollection, and some cross or difficulty comes to mind, or some thought that inspires fear, as of hell, judgment, etc., or a strong feeling of love for God—and all these are sensible, external things—all serve to intensify and deepen the elevations of the will. For this reason Almighty God often causes such thoughts and affections to come to mind, especially at the time of recollection.

In the affairs of this world natural abilities serve to bring things to their intended issue. But in supernatural matters, as the spiritual good of the soul, natural abilities are utterly insufficient. They are of use only to work upon the supernatural impulses of the Divine Spirit, to observe them and act upon them. In short, natural ability must wholly accommodate itself to Divine impulses, behaving as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, and not as an independent worker.

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Although oft-times mere human or natural action in religious matters makes for a while great stir, like the fantastic fire recorded in the life of our Holy Father, still, in time it will be found to be nothing but smoke, and will come to naught; and chiefly because mere human action intends human ends, and so will do little for the soul's good. For example, when a Confessor teaches obedience without due relation to God, to Whom alone obedience should be given, such a teacher may secure obedience for a time and while he is there; but as obedience is founded on him, it comes to naught when he leaves, and the disciple is no more truly humble, resigned, and obedient than he was before. But the teacher who inculcates obedience immediately to God is, as it were, passed over, and the disciple is brought into immediate relation with God, Who is ever permanent and present. Hence whatever becomes of the teacher, whether he live or die, remain or depart, the soul continues still in her Divine obedience, and in human also, according to the Divine will. This distinction is clearly noted by Dame Gertrude in the following passage:¹ "And this it was that made me so affect Father Baker's instructions when he first delivered them to me—because I saw they were grounded upon God, and not upon himself, Who could never fail, whatever became of Father Baker. Whereas another, who teacheth obedience in any other way of his own, when he is gone the soul will have as far to seek for her instructions as ever she had before, and so must ever be learning anew under every new Confessor, that

¹ "Apology."

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likely enough will teach in a manner other than did his predecessor."

Certainly no soul has obtained help of anyone save in so far as it made her more humble, resigned, and obedient to God and to man than she would otherwise have been. Hence by observing herself a soul may best discover what real good she has obtained from any creature. If she has altered her spiritual course at the instance of any man, by observing herself she will probably be able to judge whether the change were made by leave or at the suggestion of the Holy Spirit, or merely through a natural impulse. In Dame Gertrude's case, the doctrine planted by God and founded in God, though proposed by means of her Confessor, still remained after her separation from the tool of the Planter and Teacher. Our Blessed Saviour in the Gospel declares the structure of such a soul to be firm and sound, and the soul is esteemed wise for building on such a sure foundation. She is likened to "*the wise man who built his house upon a rock, and the rains fell, and the floods came, and the winds*" (temptations and trials) "*beat against that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock*" (Matt. vii. 24). But how different is the spiritual structure founded merely on mutable men, or on other uncertain supports! The builder of such a structure shall be likened to a "*foolish man who built his house on sand, and the rain fell and the floods came*"—that is, a new teacher, who disapproves and condemns the doctrine founded solely in and by his predecessor, a mortal, subject to error—"and the winds blew, and they beat against that house, and it fell," etc. So also in another place our Blessed Saviour says that every

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tree which His Heavenly Father—that is, the Holy Spirit in the soul—hath not planted shall be rooted up.

Dame Gertrude says in her writings¹ that the interior is of such moment that if it goes well, all other matters will stand well also. The interior goes well (and hence the exterior also) by hearkening to and following the Divine call or inspiration. For a soul capable of an interior life this should be all in all. Woe, woe—yea, a thousand times woe!—to the soul that is frightened by threats, overcome by temptations, cast by fear into perplexities, which render her unfit to hear or follow what God speaks to her, and discouraged from pursuing prayer, which may be called omnipotent, so powerful is it with God! You souls, therefore, that are capable of prayer, be grateful to God for it, for it is the greatest happiness we can possess in this life. By it one can easily pass through all things, howsoever hard and painful. By it we become familiar even with God Himself, and have our conversation in Heaven, as St. Paul observes. Thus Dame Gertrude continues at considerable length to describe the happiness of prayer with much feeling and pathos, writing only for her own spiritual comfort and defence against the opposition she found, and foresaw was yet to be, from others.

As Divine calls are the root and ground of all sanctity and salvation, I will say yet more on this subject. In monasteries where the observing of Divine calls is not practised there can be no exercise of true religion, obedience, or other meritorious virtue, especially obedience, in which a religious life principally consists. For such a religious does not do what he ought to do, or he

¹ "Apology."

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does it against his will, or if he performs the action with a good will, it is for some natural, human motive, as of fear, shame, custom, or desire to please another, or some other reason which has no relation to God. Thus at best he acts out of servile fear, and not principally out of regard to God Himself. But where Divine calls are observed, the soul not only performs all that she ought to do as regards doing, abstaining, or suffering, but she acts willingly, and only out of an immediate regard of God ; because it is His will and call, and for His sake alone, rejecting all motives ending in self, as are all that terminate not in God. Hence to observe Divine calls belongs not only to those whose propensity is to seek God interiorly, but to those whose propensity is to seek God by external deeds. For the latter also have Divine calls after their manner ; then are their deeds full of grace and meritorious. Still, their deeds are not equal to the actions of interior souls, for the latter have greater purity of intention, and regard God more immediately in Himself, or for Himself, than the former, who cannot rise higher than corporal images, and so cannot enjoy God in spirit. Purity of intention depends upon how closely we approximate to God in Himself. From this we may gather to what happiness Dame Gertrude attained through the purity of her intention, which proceeded from a clear, immediate regard of God habitually enjoyed.

Souls with a propensity to the exterior remain ever much in themselves and in their nature, and so their deeds partake much of the intentions thereof. But interior souls get more and more out of nature, and farther into God ; hence their deeds increase in purity

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of intention, and consequently their acts of resignation become purer. The ground of this tending out of themselves into God is their interior propensity, aided by grace, which causes an insatiable hunger and an unquenchable thirst in the soul for a fuller possession of God. Though the soul desire God, as it were, infinitely, she can obtain Him only in a limited measure. Still, this taste of God affords the soul some satisfaction, while the desire of a fuller enjoyment of God ever remains. Though God cannot be fully possessed by the soul in this world, still, by aspiring after Him, she obtains more and more of Him, yet always after the manner of this life. Dame Gertrude's strong propensity and ardent desire to possess and enjoy God made her choose for a motto the words of the Apostle, which she wrote at the beginning of her Breviary :

“Deus meus impleat omne desiderium meum.”

For none but He
Can satiate me.
In heart where love is seated
Nothing but love is treated.

By what light does the soul tend towards God for the more perfect enjoyment of Him? Forsooth, by observing and following the Divine voice or call, and the Divine light therein. Unless she act thus, she is, as regards the said purpose, blind and impotent. Her own natural light, or the light she may obtain from men, is of itself but darkness, and utterly insufficient for the purpose. No conceits, no devices, no conceptions of ours or of any man, whether our Superior or

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otherwise, be he never so learned or wise in natural affairs, will be of use, save in so far as he disposes us to observe and pursue the internal voice or call.

What, then, is to be said of a writer of these days who appears to have had no perception of Divine calls, but rather thrusts them out of doors, and substitutes for them what I have called the conceits and devices of men? I have urged that all things in religion are to be done in obedience to a Divine call—whether it be an external thing commanded by God through the external call of man or law, or be it an indifferent thing, comprised under no certain law, but left to the soul herself, and the greater part of our actions even in religion are included under this head. In all these different cases a contemplative soul should merely regard the internal Divine impulses and light, and not custom, nor her own natural inclination or opinions or imaginings, nor the instructions or teaching of anyone, nor of books, however learned or weighty. But the author to whom I alluded just now requires the soul in these indifferent matters to follow human opinions, and thereby debars the soul from regarding what the Divine call or will would have her to do in such cases. Thus this writer omits all mention of Divine calls, as if he did not know of their existence, or wished to banish them from his school of perfection, and substitute for them his own particular instructions for the guidance of souls.

For example, this writer says: "When any labour or humble office has to be performed, and yet not committed to anyone in particular, every one of you should strive (with obedience and discretion, it may be) to have

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it imposed upon herself rather than on another. Yea, everyone should show herself ready (if she could do so) to perform all the labours and meanest offices in the house, so that the rest might do nothing but contemplate the goodness of Almighty God and sing His praises. This should be done from a sense of our own unworthiness and the excellence of Almighty God. For, on the one hand, we should deem ourselves the least worthy of all in the house to praise God, and therefore most suitable for such mean offices. On the other hand, we should consider that Almighty God is most worthy of all praise; therefore, to augment His praise we should get all others to praise Him, while we alone who are unworthy of anything better are engaged in inferior exercises. If this be not permitted, we must accept the more honourable offices in obedience and through necessity, and not because we think ourselves worthier than others. Such holy contention is laudable, and will preserve your convent from the vice of jealousy, which proceeds from ambition, self-love, conceit, the root of dissensions in communities." Thus far this writer. But God help the community which has no better instructions or guidance than this to preserve it from pride and other causes of dissension; or where the observance of Divine calls, which alone can preserve from such evils, is neglected or unknown, as would appear to be the case with this author.

But how, pray you, is a soul to attain to such a degree of humility as is here commended by this writer? Not by listening to such human remedies and notions, but by hearkening to the Divine voice, and by pursuing His impulses, which are not only words, but works, and

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which give strength and grace to fulfil His will. This might is not to be found in such human notions, nor can they ever produce in the soul that profound sense of her own unworthiness.

If a contemplative writer had to deal with such a case, especially when writing for contemplatives, he would have advised each soul to observe and pursue the Divine call, to have first sought by prayer to learn God's will, before venturing to undertake such business through a sense of her unworthiness, or from custom or choice, or by the light of mere natural reason. When souls act thus, God will move such as He thinks fit to undertake the employment, and the other souls He will move to abstain in the matter. By this means all will perform the Divine call and will, and the work will be carried out according to the Divine appointment. To proceed thus is to act according to the spirit of our holy Rule, which would have us undertake nothing out of our own head or without consulting God, but would have us observe Divine inspirations.

How useless to Dame Gertrude would have been such instructions, whether before or after her spiritual conversion. Before her conversion such thoughts of her own unworthiness would never have entered her head; or, if they had, they would have done none of the good expected by that writer. After her conversion she would have smiled at such a project as to thrust herself into any employment out of a fancied unworthiness without first consulting God and seeking His guidance. At an earlier period, in consequence of her imperfection, she was as yet unaware of her unworthiness. Was she, then, on such a pretence to abstain from recollections

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which she plainly saw to be the only means by which she could become more worthy in God's eyes than she was at present? Alas! such human devices never did, nor never will, do souls good, because these practices have no relation to the Divine call or will. They are, indeed, but sounding brass or tinkling cymbals, which may yield a pleasing sound for an instant, but leave no permanent fruit in the soul.

Liberty of spirit is freedom of spirit to attend to and follow the light of the Holy Spirit. Opposed to liberty of spirit are human notions imposed on the soul out of her own head. The ideas of the aforementioned writer are opposed to liberty of spirit in two ways. First, because he would have a soul out of her own head, and not by an internal light or impulse from God, to undertake external employment. Consequently, the soul neglects to seek, learn, and follow the Divine will in the matter; whereas the rules of a contemplative life require that a soul should have no such burden laid on her; nor should she undertake it, if she may rightly refuse it. She should rather keep herself—that is, her spirit—in a state of abstraction or freedom from such burdens, save in so far as they may be imposed on her by the Divine Spirit. The second reason why I think this writer's teaching is contrary to liberty of spirit is because it imposes on the soul, as the motive for taking up such employment, her own unworthiness, the excellence of others, and of God. By this means the soul is turned away from the proper object of her contemplation, which should be the immediate regard of God in Himself, after the manner of this life; and is directed to the aforesaid considerations, by which she is

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deprived of the liberty which tended to the immediate regard of God. Moreover, she is drawn away from the simplicity of soul she sought after, and her mind filled with multiplicity and distraction, by considerations which cannot be made without the use of sensible images, with which the soul becomes busied; whereas the soul should seek to be free from all imaginary things and attend to God, and be united to Him in simplicity of spirit, a state above all imaginations and considerations.

A person who is not contemplative will scarcely believe, nor can he imagine, the disgust of a contemplative soul at having his head or spirit filled with such considerations, or at being hindered from an immediate, simple regard of God. Nor can anyone who is not actually in the way of contemplation easily distinguish in this author, or in any other writer, what is or is not opposed to liberty of spirit, or what tends to multiplicity. To such souls all seems good that is in harmony with reason, or conformed to the natural judgment of man. But a soul that is actually in the way of contemplation has the eye of an eagle for such purpose, and can instantly distinguish what will breed in her multiplicity and deprive her of simplicity or of liberty of spirit.

It is not surprising, then, that many—nay, most—souls would admire the teaching of this writer. For, indeed, I think most of it is in conformity with natural reason, and may do good to spirits that are not contemplative. Nor can these latter know what will hinder or promote contemplation—a difficulty which contemplatives themselves do not find. Indeed, even learned men who have not experienced contemplation may do well to seek

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from those that tend to greater simplicity and liberty of spirit what promotes multiplicity and hinders true liberty.

Though this writer uses the term "contemplate," as where he speaks of contemplating the goodness of God, yet he probably did not mean true contemplation. For contemplatives do not, properly speaking, contemplate the goodness of God, or His other attributes or works, but they contemplate the simple Divinity with their understanding and elevate their will towards It; and this they do without discourse or other exercise of the imagination about the attributes or works of God. Nor do they think about their own condition, their own unworthiness, or the worthiness of others, unless such notions are represented to them, as sometimes happens by the Divine action or by some cause independent of themselves. Even then, the contemplative soul does not tarry in such representations, but uses them only as a step for a more fervent elevation of the will towards God. But the ordinary contemplations of such souls do not consist in these particular apprehensions, as the above-mentioned writer seems to imply, but only in a simple notion and regard of God above all imaginary apprehensions, as I have said. It is lawful for men to borrow terms for their art or science which strictly belong to another. Hence some writers term certain exercises of discursive prayer contemplation. But in the school of true spirituality such exercises are not contemplation, but more properly are to be reckoned meditation. What contemplatives mean by the term "contemplation" is the regard of the Divinity immediately and above all particular images, and is called in our holy Rule "pure prayer" (*pura oratio*).

CHAPTER XXIII

CORRESPONDENCE WITH DIVINE INSPIRATIONS THE PRINCIPAL NEED OF A CONTEMPLATIVE SOUL

No affliction or adversity (which consists merely in the contradiction of the will) can befall a soul that is fully established in the way of contemplation, no matter whence the affliction proceeds, whether immediately from God or from Superiors or other creatures; nor can it hinder the soul from tending towards God by contemplation. These contradictions may be of the nature of a disgrace, denial of a request, restraints, or bodily afflictions, loss of good name, goods, etc.—all such crosses of the will are profitable for the soul, and even in a measure necessary, for they cause her contemplation to become more elevated and efficacious. Without such afflictions (which God will provide by some means or other) the soul would make very slow progress, or perhaps none at all.

Contradictions, then, will not be a hindrance to the soul. For, the understanding not being darkened by them, she will still be able to contemplate and regard God, even the more clearly perhaps on account of the contradictions to her will. The contemplation and regard of God will also enable her to surmount and overcome the difficulties occurring in her nature.

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Moreover, her propensity to seek after God, being quickened and helped by grace, will not permit her to be overcome and cast down by her contradictions, but will urge her the more on account of them to tend towards and into God, as in Whom alone she can find satisfaction and protection from the pains and misery which these contradictions cause her. Thus the soul benefits by contradictions to her natural will.

It may happen, however, that the soul is yet so imperfect, and the affliction so heavy, that her nature not only feels much pain, but becomes even heartily sick of it; nay, she may even lose strength to such a degree as to attract notice by her look and pallor; yet all the while, being habitually resigned in her superior will, she makes immense progress on that very account in contemplation and perfection. For one who is but a tender sprig in it the contradictions to her will may be so great, and she herself so weak, tender, and unskilled in the way of contemplation, that they may endanger her progress and completely oppress her. But God is never likely to send such heavy contradictions. He always accommodates them to the grace He bestows and to the degree of strength already acquired. It may, of course, happen that the Superior or others may overburden a soul with things which are contrary to her will through ignorance of her internal disposition or the measure of her grace and strength. It is, therefore, best for the Superior to lay on a soul no more burdens that are contrary to her will than necessity obliges him to do. These burdens will then be akin to those which God Himself immediately imposes on the soul, and are never likely to harm her or hinder her progress.

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But when the burden, in addition to being contrary to the will of the soul, also occasions confusion in the understanding, whereby she is darkened, entangled, and perplexed in her contemplation and immediate regard of God, then the soul will be in much greater danger of being stopped and overthrown in her spiritual course; yea, even though she should be already well exercised and experienced in the way. These troubles of the understanding are desolations and obscurities of soul, fears, scrupulosity of conscience, and other such matters. They are apt to breed confusion and perplexity in the understanding, and hinder the contemplation of the soul. To these troubles of the understanding Dame Gertrude was at times subject.

It should, however, be noticed that as these temptations are the greatest and most perilous, so for the soul that bears herself aright under them they are to be accounted among the most profitable of all. When they proceed from the action of God, or (which is all one) from the natural disposition of the person, there is less danger of his being overcome, because God, their Author, provides grace in proportion to the temptations, if only the soul will make use of it. But when such temptations come from men, as from the Superior or Director, the soul is in much greater danger of being cast down unless Almighty God provides a greater grace, comparable to the greatness of the temptation.

In the case of Dame Gertrude (and her Sisters, too) you will find these observations justified. For nothing pierced her so deeply to the quick, and so threatened the destruction of her spiritual course, as those temptations which tended to perplex her understanding and

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hinder her contemplation and regard of God, wherein lay her remedy for all the miseries of life. But the afflictions which touched her will only were easily repulsed and dissipated by her regard of God; this enabled her, as she says, to walk on thorns—that is, on crosses—with as much pleasure as if they had been roses (“Apology”).

Of the other afflictions of the understanding Dame Gertrude very frequently and feelingly complained; indeed, she greatly feared them. Of this kind was the passion of fear, which tended to darken her understanding, and to which, on account of her peculiar temperament, she was much subject. From this fear sprang her doubts about her former confessions and the security of pursuing her spiritual course.

Peace, the happiness of the soul, proceeds from this: that we perform our actions at the inspiration or call of God, by which means He enlightens the understanding and moves the will. This is evident from the words of the prophet (Isa. xxvi. 12): “*O Lord God, Thou wilt give unto us peace; for Thou hast wrought all our works in us.*” Hence we may say with the Psalmist:

He is my light,
And all my might.¹

This principle applies not only to action, but also to refraining from action, abstention, and suffering. In all these respects our conduct will be as a Divine work, if our action is guided by Divine inspiration. Other works, however good in themselves, if undertaken out of our own head by a natural light or impulse, will

¹ “*Dominus illuminatio mea,*” and “*Dominus regit mihi*” (Ps. xxii. 1).

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have but a natural end, and consequently will receive but a natural reward, and this even though the works appertain to one's office or vocation. This is what Tauler meant when he said that God rewards no works but His own. Such works will ring true when tested by the Divine touchstone; the others will not. This distinction is indicated in these words of the Gospel: "*He that doth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be manifest, because they are done in God*" (John iii. 21). This necessary quality in our works cannot, however, be obtained without the serious pursuit of abstraction and mortification. "*God hath wrought all things for Himself*" (Prov. xvi. 4), says the Wise Man; that is, for His own ends. He therefore not only moves the soul to do the works, but also to do them for Him, and to exclude other ends. This produces purity of intention in the works, and consequently renders them meritorious.¹ Works which proceed from other sources or motives can have no such purity, and consequently can have but little merit in them. Hence we must, above all things, attend to the Divine call or inspiration; nor is there any other means to secure our sanctification.

In souls that are ruled by Divine inspirations, God is both the beginning and end of all that they do, or refrain from, or suffer. In such a life the soul has the knowledge of God and of her self—knowledge which alone is to be desired, for it teaches and provokes the soul to all humility and obedience. This knowledge is

¹ It must not be thought that an actual advertence to God is required for each act to render it meritorious. A virtual attention (or intention) suffices. The more actual, however, the attention (or intention) is, the purer is the action and the more meritorious. Cf. note, p. 191.

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obtained by taking to heart the injunction *Vacate et videte*. *Vacate* means abstraction which disposes for contemplation; *videte* is contemplation itself, attained in recollection, which enables the soul to discern the Divine will, and obtain strength (which the impulse communicates to the inert will) to perform what is commanded; yea, and to perform it only because it is God's will. Such a soul cannot but be at peace with God, since He works His will and pleasure in her and by her, and she in all things accommodates her will to His.

This was the disposition of the holy prophet; well, therefore, might he say: "*Lord God, Thou wilt give unto us peace; for Thou hast wrought all our works in us.*" Nor is there true humility or obedience, save when it proceeds from observing Divine inspirations; for nature, corrupted by sin, is blinded and incapable of causing or exercising these or other virtues as they should be exercised. There must, therefore, be a power above nature to effect it—namely, Divine inspirations, observed and pursued by the soul. How is it that so many souls who have been thirty and forty years in religion, and have done and suffered exteriorly much, are still as unresigned, proud, and disobedient interiorly as they were when they took the habit? Indeed, perhaps they are even worse than they were, for it was the Divine inspiration that brought them into religion; and for a time at least they endeavoured as best they could to follow the Divine inspirations. But these souls, not having been taught to observe inspirations, they left them; or, rather, these souls turned away from their inspirations: hence they daily increased more and more in self-love.

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What, then, did Dame Gertrude need at the beginning but to be taught how to correspond with Divine inspirations, which still called upon her to amend her life? What, again, enabled her to say to the Abbess in her last sickness, in the words of the prophet, "God has given peace to my soul"? What enabled her to rely immediately on God, without assurance or comfort from man? It was her habitual correspondence with the Divine call or inspirations, for nothing else could give such security of conscience or confidence towards God. Moreover, it is Divine inspirations that batter down the will of the soul that corresponds with them, till at length, by long exercise, the will is bruised to nothing. Then propriety or self-love is diminished and at length destroyed, and perfect subjection to God takes its place. This is humility, a humility which causes obedience and all other virtues to flourish. In like degree the understanding is enlightened by the said inspirations, as to what it should do, how it should act, abstain, or suffer. Nature neither will nor can do this. What it does in this direction is done weakly, blindly, and insufficiently, as I have elsewhere shown.

What, then, can satisfy a longing soul? or what do souls with an aptitude for the contemplative life want when they complain of a lack of instruction, or seek for it at random hither and thither, wherever their natural reason tells them it is most likely to be found? Nothing else do they need but to be taught how to discern and correspond with Divine inspirations. When a capable soul has learnt how to do this, she is satisfied, and sees that she cannot have a better or a higher Doctor or doctrine. She therefore seeks no

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more after external teachers, save in so far as her internal inspirations bid her so to do. Indeed, if a soul had all the scholastic learning of St. Thomas infused into her—yea, the knowledge of all men and angels—it would not serve to give her satisfaction. Not unlikely her natural perversity would turn such knowledge to her own detriment by increasing pride and other disorders, unless she embraced this doctrine and observed and corresponded with Divine inspirations. If she did this, no knowledge would hurt her; yea, rather it would be a help, if not to her, at least to others. But for herself, she would need no other knowledge but how to observe and follow Divine inspirations.

This knowledge, as Dame Gertrude well points out in one of her writings ("Apology"), may be comprised in half a dozen lines. But as souls are not all equally capable, it may be advisable to give fuller instructions in the matter for the benefit of less gifted souls.

I said just now that the observance of Divine inspirations brings great peace to the soul at the hour of death, as in the case of Dame Gertrude. Let us now look at the reverse of the picture. What is it that causes terror in the conscience of many souls at the hour of death but their neglect to correspond with Divine inspirations? So that, wanting the testimony of a good conscience, they seek assurance from without, asking of others what indeed they cannot tell—Is all well with me? If anyone should promise such a soul peace it would not be a sufficient warrant, but a mere saying of peace where perhaps there is no peace. "*For what man,*" says St. Paul, "*knoweth the things of a*

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man, but the spirit of a man that is in him ?” (I Cor. ii. 11). He himself of all men knows how he has corresponded with Divine inspirations ; it is obedience only to them that can give peace to the soul. The neglect of correspondence with them proceeds from want of abstraction and recollection, as I said before.

The working of God (which I have called inspiration) in and by the soul, and her correspondence with it, is the kingdom of God, which we daily pray may come to us or be in us. This kingdom our Saviour desires us to look for above all things. “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice*” (Matt. vi. 33). When God has introduced His kingdom into the soul, He purifies her and her intentions, and makes her the seat of His justice, and there in the kingdom of her soul works His will and exercises His justice.

The character of this kingdom of God is more fully described by our Lord where He says that His kingdom “*cometh not with observation*” (Luke xviii.)—that is, by regarding what is to be seen and learnt by the senses ; nor are those persons right who say : “*Behold it [the kingdom of God] is here ; or behold it is there ;*” for behold the “*kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke xvii. 21)—that is, by corresponding with the Divine impulses and admonitions within yourself. Those persons, then, are in effect reprehended in the Gospel that say, The kingdom of God is here or there ; who teach, as is commonly done in these days, that the kingdom of God, or the way of perfection, consists in these or those internal or external exercises which are performed only with our senses ; who teach souls according to their own fancy, and so instil their own inspirations into them, instead of teaching them to attend to the Divine. Sed non

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sic profecto pervenit regnum Dei — Surely the kingdom of God cannot come thus! Some, indeed, will perhaps go farther, and assert that the practice of attending to Divine calls or inspirations is perilous, and so utterly deter souls from observing them. Such persons teach souls to seek the kingdom of God here or there, where it is not to be found—that is, in some particular exercises, without further relation to Divine inspirations which alone can cause the kingdom of God in the soul. Teachers thus following their own experience or fancies will never be able to hit upon the things suitable to the needs of their disciples. These should be taught to attend to the Divine Teacher, Who teaches aright in everything, readily and with clearness, being always present; for He is light itself, most willing to teach, and knows all things. This was signified by the prophet when he said: “*The Lord ruleth me, and nothing shall be wanting to me*” (Ps. xxii. 1)—that is, I have, according to my duty, referred the rule and guidance of my soul to God, and I shall lack nothing that is necessary for me to have and to know. The soul in whom God thus reigns lives according to the true knowledge of God and of herself. This is the only knowledge we should seek after, as St. Augustine implied when he said: “If I should know Thee, I should know myself.”¹

But no one, it must be confessed, can teach practically another how to observe Divine inspirations unless he has learnt the practice experimentally himself, and is actually pursuing it in his own soul, for such knowledge cannot be had except by experience in oneself. This is the principal reason why there are so few capable

¹ “Noverim Te, noverim me.”

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teachers of the way of perfection, because so few spiritual guides give themselves seriously to the observance of Divine inspirations. Not only are such guides unable to teach the observance of inspirations, but, speaking generally, they show little zeal for promoting, as much as they might, the practice in others. As they themselves are remiss in the observance of inspirations, what interest can they have in promoting it in others, especially when, from want of experience in themselves, they scarcely know what the doctrine is, or what or how to promote it in others?

Indeed, the observance of inspirations is precisely what I have termed the doctrine and practice of an internal life. This no one can know or rightly understand without experience of it in himself, by leading an interior life; without doing so, it is impossible for him to instil it or promote it in others.

It will be well (for want of something better) if a soul that is already in the way of perfection be not put out of it, but be suffered to follow it quietly, and pick up such help as she may need or be able to find. But if such a soul will but adhere to her interior Teacher, He will procure for her all friends and means necessary to support her in her course—not perhaps friends who are pursuing the selfsame course of the spirit, for of that I could not assure her, but friends by other titles, natural friends, whom God will supernaturally direct to bear her up. These friendships, indeed, not springing up through the bond of a similar spiritual course, but for extrinsic reasons, which are very various, are apt to be unstable and unreliable. It is different, however, when the friendship arises *ex natura rei*, from love of

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the spiritual course itself. Friends of this kind are drawn together by their interest in the spiritual course itself, and consequently the soul feels more confidence and security in her course than she would if she had been assured by friends who were friendly for other extrinsic reasons.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRINCIPAL BENEFITS OF ATTENDING TO DIVINE INSPIRATIONS

I HAVE shown at considerable length that no one without experience in the way of the spirit, or, as is all one, without practising correspondence with Divine inspirations, can teach it to others. But, on the other hand, a soul who has practised it, if only for one year, and is otherwise unlearned, will be more capable of teaching it than another, however learned, who is without experience. Never have I heard of anyone, be he never so learned, who, without personal experience, was able to put a soul into the way of the spirit. But many souls, as St. Teresa and others, with no guide but experience in themselves, have helped others into the said way. Many, however, are taught of God, without any help of man.

But let us see how souls enter upon this way. It often happens that souls in their noviceship have to endure many mortifications and contradictions to their wills. But these afflictions avail but little to produce the habit of mortification, which consists in a spiritual death to self-love and created things. Consequently the benefit they might have derived from these mortifi-

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cations is wasted and lost. The reason of this is that the soul is not in a course that will enable her to get out of nature into God. The only thing that will lift her out of nature into God is the aforesaid working of God, Divine inspirations, and the correspondence of the soul therewith. Nature can never be truly mortified except by the soul getting out of herself into God, and this is the only means to accomplish it.

When the soul has attained to the way of the spirit, all occurring contradictions avail to increase in her the habit of mortification, for they present her with the occasion to elevate herself more efficaciously out of herself into God. Such a soul, by prayer and mortification, in time (if she persevere) will acquire a perfect habit of mortification and of Divine love. I say in time—some sooner, some later, according to the grace of inspirations and their correspondence therewith; for the soul, however eager, must exercise patience and await her destined time, which can be known only to God, Who is the absolute Disposer and Ruler of all. These mortifications, together with prayer, raise the soul more and more out of nature into God—that is, out of the propriety of nature, self-love, into a simplicity of obedience and conformity of will to the Divine will.

Mortifications befalling souls who do not correspond with Divine inspirations cause pain, and make them perhaps wiser in human affairs, but leave their nature unreformed and their lives full of self-love and self-seeking. Thus will our nature ever remain until it loses itself in God; and this it cannot do except by serious and careful correspondence with Divine inspirations, both as regards prayer and mortification.

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To the soul that acts thus such power and virtue will in time be communicated, that natural propriety or self-love and wilfulness will be, as it were, annihilated, and thereupon the Divine kingdom will be introduced in stability and perfection. Mortifications borne out of natural will and judgment (whencesoever they proceed) will be powerless to form the habit of Divine and meritorious mortification, because they are undertaken at the bidding of nature, and tend to serve nature only. But when they are performed with and by a Divine inspiration, they tend to mortify the soul in very deed, and render her truly Divine.

It is not surprising that some persons make a jest of the mortifications they suffered in the noviceship, or afterwards in religion, if these penances were embraced out of a natural will and judgment, no matter whether they were assumed by themselves, or inflicted by God or Superiors or others. Such mortifications do the soul no good, because they are not embraced in obedience to a Divine inspiration or call.

Moreover, nothing can so effectually liberate the soul from all kinds of hypocrisy (to which the religious life is much subject) as correspondence with Divine inspirations, for they purify the intention in everything; whereas the soul that does not pursue this course suffers, abstains, or acts from a motive of shame, or for fear of penance, or to gain or keep the good opinion of others, or out of custom, necessity, or other motive not truly Divine. The habit and profession of the religious life denote purity of intention, or at least a striving after it, and this can be attained only by correspondence with Divine inspirations. For what in truth is hypocrisy

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but intending and seeking ourselves interiorly, while outwardly we pretend to seek God, His love, and His honour? Our holy Rule in its very first words lays this foundation, and urges us to build upon it. It says: "We are to return to God by obedience, from Whom we have departed by disobedience" (Prologue). As our disobedience was neglect of the Divine voice, so our return to innocence and virtue must be by obedience to the Divine voice. In this is included obedience to man (as is signified by our Saviour in the words, "*He that heareth you heareth Me*"—Luke x. 16); but the root of that obedience must be the immediate submission to the Divine voice or inspiration.

In another place (chap. iv.) our holy Father desires us "to fulfil daily by our deeds the commandments of God." This also should be understood of obedience to Divine inspirations or the Divine will, and should include also external authority, the Abbot and other Superiors. In the chapter on the office of Abbot he is bid to do nothing, not against (*contra*), but outside the limits of God's command (*extra præceptum Dei*)—that is, that the Superior should not teach or command anything without consultation with the Divine Spirit, taking all his light and instructions from Him, or at least doing nothing without His leave. If the Superior acts thus, his soul will be adorned and replenished with Divine justice, and all his external acts and teaching will be seasoned with the leaven of Divine justice abiding in him. His teaching and deeds will be instilled or, as it were, sprinkled on the minds and hearts of his disciples, and will work in them a Divine and supernatural effect, because both word and deed take their

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root and derive their power from a supernatural, Divine spring or fountain, which abides in his soul. This is the wisdom which our holy Father desires (chap. lxiv.) to see in the one who shall be chosen Abbot—not natural talent or learning, for this even heathens often have in a high degree, but that heavenly light which will enable him to understand the things that will benefit souls and to guide them to their supernatural end.

Certainly there is no true justice nor work of justice, as understood by our holy Father, save in so far as it proceeds from the kingdom of God reigning in the soul, God using the powers of the soul at His pleasure, and causing her to follow His inspirations, and not the inspirations of her nature or of other creatures.

What, then, is to be thought of that treatise to which I have alluded, in which the author seems wholly to rely upon natural light for the right conduct of the Abbot and also of the subject? He seems to suppose that they have little or no relation to Divine inspirations for their conduct, or as though no light was to be had from them. Observe that where the author instructs the Abbess how to act in the discharge of her office there is not a word about inspirations; nor does he so much as hint that she should have recourse to God for light. He speaks only of the great difficulty to command aright, and here I am one with him. Still, the difficulty is not so great, nor perhaps great at all, if only the Abbot acts in his office in obedience to God, if he has recourse to God for light and help in all his doings. If he act thus, there can be little doubt but that his difficulty would be much diminished, if not wholly

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taken away. But if he rely on his natural ability and experience (to which the author seems to refer him, and on which they depend who do not attend to Divine inspirations), though he should have the brains and experience of all the men in the world, it will not avail him to promote souls to the foresaid supernatural end.

This treatise, moreover, seems to suppose that it is an easy thing to obey. It is nothing of the kind. To obey aright and religiously by our natural light or ability (to which the treatise refers the subject) is not only difficult, but impossible, as may be seen from the following notable words (Book i., chap. iii.) of Cassian : "The holy Fathers of Egypt and Thebes declare that to govern or be governed aright belongs to a wise and perfect soul. To rule or be ruled aright they hold to be the highest gift and grace of the Holy Ghost. For a ruler knows not how to lay upon obedient subjects wholesome precepts, unless he himself be furnished with all virtues within ; nor is a subject able to obey his Superior aright until the subject is perfect in the fear of God and in humility."

But let us turn to the actual words of the treatise, and see if they do not bear me out, and apparently refer all things to natural ability, without any reference to Divine inspirations. And if the author neglects to refer the Abbess to God for Divine light, which is so necessary for the government of others, how much less likely is he to remit the subject to that Divine source !

But hear his words : "To me it seems a thing so difficult [namely, to command aright] that I know not the art of it myself, so I cannot teach it to others." I believe him. But God can teach the art, and will

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teach it, if the Abbot will depend upon Him, and not on his natural abilities.

But hear how our author continues: "I have had some practice in the matter of obedience, and have learnt some lessons in it." But if these lessons were without reference to Divine inspirations or calls, they were very poor lessons indeed.

He continues: "But as regards commanding, though I have had some little experience in it, I find it is a matter which requires very great discretion." I believe him there. But where is discretion to be had except by the descent of it from the "Father of Lights"?

But he continues: "So that I know not on almost every occasion what to do." He means, of course, when in authority; and I believe him, if he relies on his natural light only, and does not dispose himself to receive the only true and adequate light for the purpose.

To continue: "To command another discreetly about whose pulse I cannot easily judge is very hard." But God discerns all dispositions, and can manifest them to whom He pleases, and will disclose them to him who should know them, and who depends on God for such knowledge. But try to find, if it be possible, any difference in the procedure of this author and that of a secular magistrate—perhaps a pagan—in the government of a commonwealth. They both act merely according to the light of natural reason.

But our author continues: "Do you think, then, that I could give lessons to teach a woman to govern without fault?" I believe you can do little in the matter if you instil into her only your own natural ideas; but if you teach her to observe Divine inspira-

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tions (if she does not already do so), you surely teach her much, and, in fact, as much as she needs.

The author continues: "Yet even if I could give such instructions, there never would be found a woman that would learn and practise them." Why so? May not a woman learn them as you learnt them—from natural reason and experience, if you had them thence, or from the Divine Spirit, if that is the source from which you derived your knowledge?

He continues: "I except always Saints, in whom these cold parts of the world are very barren in these days." But why, pray, do you except Saints? What difference is there between them and ordinary souls, save only that they observe Divine inspirations better than others? And why did Saints rule better than others, except that they obtained more light from above for it, and for which others did not seek or dispose themselves? Again, why should this part of the world be termed *cold*, except that souls living there are cold in Divine love? And this proceeds from not attending to and following Divine inspirations. Again, why are we barren in Saints in these days, except that we do not now, as they did in holier times, apply ourselves to the observance of Divine inspirations? If you had commended the pursuit of them to the Abbess for the discharge of her office, you would have given a sufficient lesson, if she would but take it to heart. For beyond all doubt there are plenty of women in these days, and I believe even more than of men, capable of pursuing Divine inspirations; and without the pursuit of them no spiritual Superior can discharge his office aright. So long as the members of our Order both taught and

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practised correspondence to Divine inspirations, so long did the Order flourish in sanctity ; but when they gave over attending to inspirations, and began to rely upon natural means, they fell off in holiness. Such was the case also with other Orders, especially the Order of St. Francis. As long as his disciples observed Divine inspirations, which are specially commended in their Rule, they remained indeed seraphic. In one passage, for instance, St. Francis, having declared that he did not desire his disciples to become learned, went on to say : “ But above all things let the brethren desire to have in them the Spirit of God and His holy working.” The decay of the Order has proceeded from the neglect only of that teaching ; and till its members pursue a right course in this matter, and revive the ancient practice, they never will attain to a true reformation that will produce sanctity, however exact the observance they maintain in external matters, as is often done by Congregations in these days. The same is particularly true of ourselves. Until we revive this doctrine and dispose ourselves to attend to Divine inspirations, and actually labour to live according to them both interiorly and exteriorly, our apparent reforms are mere shadows, without substance ; nor will our reforms ever come to anything really substantial or truly holy.

But, alas ! I fear that this doctrine has so far departed from among ourselves and other ancient Orders that there are a great number (God grant that it be not the greater number !) that know not what Divine inspirations are, either practically or speculatively. I mean that few seem to understand that the external observance of

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the Rule was instituted and our Constitutions drawn up only to enable us duly to pursue Divine inspirations. Otherwise the Rule and Constitutions would be of little worth, for the observance of Divine inspirations is the main purpose of the query in our Rule—"For what have you come?" (*Ad quid venisti?* chap. lx.). How many in our Order are ignorant that this is its principal scope, and that this is the purpose of all other Orders, especially of Contemplative Orders! How many there are in the Order who do not so much as imagine that those words of the Rule intimate or intend Divine inspirations, or who fail to understand that the words "return by obedience" to the Divine voice, or that exhortation "to do nothing without earnest prayer to God," by which light and strength is to be had for the matter in hand, is intended to teach this same doctrine! Or, again, in the following passage how many know that, "Our eyes being opened to the deifying light, let us hear with attentive ears (of the soul) what the Divine voice daily admonisheth us of, . . . and that we never depart from the guidance of God, but persevere under His teaching until death," means nothing else than that we should correspond with Divine inspirations and the inward teaching of God! These words are all taken from the prologue of our holy Rule, and express the drift and end of the external observances of the Rule which follow, and are, as it were, founded upon the prologue. And that scope or end, as we have seen, is that we should observe the impulses, guidance, and light of the Holy Spirit.

That it may be clearly understood that this was the source of the sanctity of the Order of St. Francis—and

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the same may be said of all other Orders—I will quote the words of Brother Ricerius de Marchia, companion of St. Francis, and they will be found in complete harmony with the words of St. Francis himself already alluded to. The passage is contained in a little treatise by Brother Ricerius, called “The Speedy Way to Perfection.” He says: “Neither must he think to direct himself by the care and forethought of his own senses and judgment, but he must remain always ready and disposed to follow the call of the Divine Spirit, which way soever it shall please Him to call.” And a little farther on he says: “The soul, generally speaking, is guided by this light in all particular things which she has to do, because she is illuminated by the same light (whereby she is filled) to know, reverence, and consider the honour and will of God in all things that happen to her. Also in this light the perfection of all virtues is given to the soul.” Again, this writer says: “Just as a man who has a wall before his eyes at some distance away sees not only the wall, but everything between him and it, so the soul that is illuminated by this light sees Almighty God and all things else that he has to do.”

As this treatise is very short, and seems exactly to describe the way and means by which God directed Dame Gertrude, I will append it to the end of her “Confessions,” though she was never acquainted with it, the copies we now have coming to the house after her death.¹ I am sure it would have been a great

¹ Father Baker's intention, unfortunately, was never carried out, and the copies here referred to have long disappeared. I have been unable to discover any copy of the work.

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comfort to her to have read it ; but it pleased God to ordain otherwise, for her greater merit. He Himself abundantly imparted to her its doctrine.

The ground of perfection in all souls ever was, is, and will be the same—namely, the Divine light or inspiration. The light or inspirations may, however, differ in different souls. For God enlightens souls according to their several capacities and requirements, much also according to the quality of their temperaments ; nay, even the same soul God enlightens or inspires in divers ways according to her state or degree of perfection to which she has attained. Yet still and ever they are Divine lights by which the soul must be guided towards perfection or the increase of it.

I would to God that the judicious and unbiassed reader would but compare the treatise of Brother Ricerius de Marchia with the author I have been animadverting upon, and observe whether the teaching of the latter does not tend to seek perfection rather by natural than by supernatural light. But Brother Ricerius, on the other hand, inculcates that the latter light is necessary, and so necessary that without it no other light will suffice. Nay, he esteems, and that most truly and justly, the supernatural light to be all in all, though I am inclined to think that ordinarily such light is only the clearing and illumination of our natural reason, which enables the soul to see what the light of nature in the state of innocence (and of faith in our present condition) suggests and teaches us. But we cannot clearly discern in our souls such truths by the light of reason on account of the inordinate passions reigning there through sin, for passions darken or

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obscure the natural light of reason. But Divine inspirations remove or control inordinate passions, whereby the natural light is partially restored to the reason, and the latter in a measure returns to the condition or state of original justice. If, however, you should urge that God, besides removing inordinate passions and clearing the reason of false lights, often adds to the natural light some portion of light that is purely supernatural, I shall not contradict you, for I think that it may be so.

To the soul that thus corresponds to the Divine lights and bidding God becomes, after the manner of this life, what He is to the Blessed in Heaven—that is, in the words of the Apostle (Col. iii.), all in all (*omnia in omnibus*). For this is what God is to the soul when He is the beginning, middle and end of every movement of body and soul. The mere cessation of action at the Divine bidding is a thousand times more pleasing to God than the noblest and most wonderful deeds performed out of a mere natural impulse ; and such are all deeds that are not done out of a Divine impulse. Moreover, as I have observed already, works that are undertaken out of a Divine impulse alone commonly attain their end ; whereas works taken up out of our own head usually end in nothing. I am speaking here of supernatural things, not merely of human affairs. These Almighty God usually leaves to our own natural abilities.

Our holy Rule and Constitutions serve to enable us to observe better the Divine inspirations, as the former regulate external matters for the peace of the house, and thereby each soul is set free to attend more fully to

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Divine inspirations. Besides, the Rule and Constitutions take the place of immediate Divine inspirations as regards external matters regulated by them, so that concerning these the soul is under no necessity to heed or attend to Divine inspirations. In such cases the Divine inspiration directs the soul to perform what is prescribed by these regulations, but for God and in obedience to Him, and to exclude all other inferior motives. But a spiritual person who lives not under obedience, as our holy Father in his cave and thousands of other hermits, must be guided as regards both external and internal matters by Divine inspirations and calls.

In conclusion, attend above all things, as I have repeatedly advised, to the Divine call. If you do so, it will protect you against all that Satan or other creatures can do against you. Then you may say: "*The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear?*" (Ps. xxvi. 1). He to Whom you so closely attend will carry you through all difficulties. But if you rely on any other support, you fail utterly. Still, you must ever distinguish God Himself from all His gifts, graces, calls, light, and other created things, in none of which are you to rest, but only in God Himself, Who is infinitely above them all. Use these and all other things in so far as they help you to serve Him better, or to tend more fully towards Him; but rest not in any of them, nor adhere to them with affection. Ever reserve your affection for the Uncreated Good, Whom we can never fully possess in this life; yet may we ever draw nearer and nearer to Him! Our real attainment to Him will be deferred to the future life.

Observance of Divine inspirations in relation to

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prayer is particularly commended to us by our holy Rule (chap. xx.). It tells us that prayer must be *short* when it proceeds from an ordinary Divine inspiration; for such inspiration gives light and power to the soul only for a brief space of time. Prayer is intended to proceed from a Divine inspiration, for otherwise it could not be *pure*—the second quality required by St. Benedict. By pure is meant free from the images of creatures. Only Divine inspiration or working can cause such purity. For if a man work by himself only, it is wholly by the use of the images of creatures, and then the prayer cannot be pure. But when the Divine inspiration is extraordinary, or, as St. Benedict expresses it, when the grace or favour to prolong the prayer is given by God beyond the ordinary time, the soul should correspond with the invitation and abide in her prayer. So that both a long prayer and a short one are to be exercised according to the Divine impulse or inspiration.

Though our holy Father speaks specially of the duration of prayer in the above passage, he must be understood also to mean that the soul is to observe the other qualities of Divine inspiration about prayer, as, for example, how she is to exercise her understanding and will in it. Divine inspiration should especially guide her about the application of the will, termed in chap. lii. “fervour of heart” (*intentio cordis*)—that is, that the soul should not strain her natural powers, her will particularly (for the understanding is not much used here), in order to elevate it to God. The soul should elevate her will neither more nor less than the Divine inspiration invites her or enables her to do. In a word, she should duly correspond with the Divine

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inspiration in all the circumstances and qualities of the elevation of her will. For if she apply her will and elevate it less than the inspiration directs her to do, it would be a culpable remissness on her part; and on the other hand, if she attempted more, it would be presumption and hurtful, for she would be trying to do more than God willed or enabled her to do; and she would make it appear as though she could do with her natural powers what, indeed, God alone can do, or as if she could add to the power and operation of God by her own activity. In such a case her efforts would be not only inefficacious, but a cause probably of interior confusion, and some injury perhaps to her head or senses. The ability to elevate the will, as I have already said, lies in the propensity, whose action is intensified by grace and inspiration on the part of God, and by purity of intention on the part of the soul.

CHAPTER XXV

DAME GERTRUDE'S FIDELITY TO DIVINE INSPIRATIONS

WHEN speaking on the subject of abstraction, it will be remembered that I said that abstraction was a disposition to contemplation. I will now add that to render abstraction perfect it must be both external and internal. External abstraction is a corporal forbearance which restrains us from meddling with things not committed to us by the Divine inspiration. This forbearance includes a restraint from mental solicitude, for solicitude involves the use of the corporal internal senses.

Internal abstraction consists in restraining our affection from the things committed to us by Divine inspiration, and directing our affection wholly upon God alone. Internal abstraction can never be practised unless we practise external also. For if we undertake a matter out of our head and inclination only, we are nearly certain to handle it with inordinate affection; for the passion that led us to take the matter in hand will doubtless continue in the execution of it, unless the passion be cast out by some other which takes its place.

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External abstraction (and much more internal) cannot be practised aright without the pursuit also of recollection, for it is only by the light of recollection that we can discern inspirations. So unless the soul pursues recollection, she will either take upon herself more than the Divine inspiration would have her or too little. The latter fault is as great as the former, for it proceeds from sloth or some other inordinate passion. Souls err usually in one or other respect, according to their several dispositions. For some are naturally too slow to take up the duties or matters that belong to them through sloth or timidity. Others, whose nature is more active, fall into the opposite error, by taking on themselves more than they should. From this proceeds the inability to distinguish between what appertains to them and what does not, and the things that concern them they perform with much self-love and adhesion. Such disorders indispose souls very much for recollection, so that they will not or cannot pursue recollection; or if they do pursue it they derive little spiritual benefit from it, unless through the light obtained in it they strive to reform these disorders. When these active natures neglect to use recollection for the due guidance of their actions and take upon themselves what does not concern them, they only darken their souls and render themselves less fit for recollection and the right performance of what Divine inspirations impose upon them. The conduct of such souls closely resembles the man, as recorded in the "Lives of the Fathers," whom Arsenius saw in a vision cutting wood. This man made a load so heavy that he was unable to lift it to his shoulder. He then went to work and cut more wood,

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and added this to his former burden, and again tried to lift it, but found that he was still less able than before. Thus internal abstraction causes purity of intention, for the intention then runs wholly upon God. But, on the other hand, things undertaken out of our own head, without a Divine inspiration, are performed no otherwise than as we began them—namely, out of self-love or self-esteem.

Now, it may be asked, in what did the spiritual life of Dame Gertrude and her Sisters consist? It consisted wholly in correspondence to Divine inspirations and calls. This being so, could they relinquish their course at the suggestion of men or other creatures? I think you will and must say, No. But I will forbear to say more, as I have already said enough, though indeed it is hard to say too much, when it is to uphold a doctrine so necessary for salvation and perfection, and to liberate this principle of conduct from misunderstanding or misrepresentation. Indeed, souls cannot truly and rightly perform obedience unless they observe and carry out Divine inspirations, which should enlighten them and enable them to obey man in the way God requires. God has no fault to find with man save in so far as he has neglected His inspirations and calls (and I take them in a large sense, as I always do, as containing all kinds of obligations); nor, on the other hand, has He any reward laid up for him save in so far as he has obeyed Divine inspirations. It was faithful correspondence to Divine inspirations that rendered Samuel in his old age so confident in his conscience that he was able to say to the people: "*Behold how from my youth I have lived among you, and you have seen my*

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conversation from that time even to this day. Lo, I am here in your presence. Speak of me in the presence of our Lord and of His Christ, whether," etc. (1 Kings xii. 2, 3).

These words of Samuel plainly declare the confidence that a soul who is careful to correspond with Divine inspirations enjoys both in life and in death; no other souls can have such true confidence. According to the soul's fidelity in corresponding with Divine inspirations, so will be the confidence of her conscience, neither more nor less.

Though the prophet Samuel spoke to the people about external matters only—for of no other could they testify—we must presume that he interiorly, as well as exteriorly, corresponded with Divine inspirations; for otherwise it would have been not merely idle, but hypocritical of him to make such a solemn protestation. For what satisfaction could it give him to be innocent as to commission of crimes exteriorly, if in the secrecy of his heart and desire he had yielded to them, and had not interiorly as well as exteriorly corresponded with Divine inspirations? Oh, how happy will be the death of those who have such confidence in their own conscience! Nothing can procure this confidence but correspondence with Divine inspirations; and whosoever shall correspond diligently, though he will not escape those frailties which are inseparable from this life, he will at least need no comfort or assurance from any creature, for he will find it where alone it is to be had, in his own soul, or rather in God, Whom such a soul enjoys as her own.

As to the nature of the work which the soul takes in hand, God neither cares nor need the soul care. The

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work may be great or little, easy or difficult, noble or humble; it may be a matter of doing or not doing, a work of mortification or pleasure; but provided it be a work that God would have her to do, and that she undertake it and perform it purely because God wills her to do it, it will be all one to the soul that in all things desires to carry out the Divine inspirations. Nor will such a soul draw a distinction between one kind of work and another; for all and each she undertakes for God, and as far as she can, she regards God in them all alike—that is, she acts as purely as possible for His love, honour, and service, renouncing all personal advantage and ends. Nor does she care what external success may attend her work, for in that also she refers herself to God's will, which in all respects she alone regards. Indeed, God cares not what we do, provided only that we are doing His will. This doctrine is well illustrated in the "Lives of the Fathers," where we read that some of the hermits (who wholly pursued Divine inspirations) spent their time working baskets, though they knew that they would never use them, but burn them at the end of the year.

This doctrine which I have expressed is in harmony with the teaching of mystic writers. They strongly advise us to find and take God equally in all kinds of works, accidents, and events whatsoever, provided they are lawful, and not to seek or regard God unequally, as if He were more in some works or things than in others. He should be found equally in all kinds of works. He who acts thus acts according to truth, for God in Himself is always alike; and as He is in all things, and is even the existence and essence of all things, so in

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Himself, He is always alike and ever the self-same. He, therefore, may be alike found and enjoyed in all works undertaken for Him, whether small or great.

It is the greatest—yea, indeed, the only—happiness and peace of the soul to have God as the Master, Director, and Ruler of all her powers, the Light of her understanding, the Mover and Director of her will. Such a soul needs no help from without for the guidance of her interior (wherein alone true happiness consists) save in so far as the internal master remits her to others for help or light. This commonly is only about external or corporal matters. All the comfort and confidence, therefore, that the soul has or seeks is to be wholly in God's hands. Then she neither needs nor may seek comfort, help, or light from creatures, save only according to the will of her internal Lord, and in obedience to Him, to Whom she wholly belongs and ever desires to belong. A more certain sign that a soul belongs wholly to God, and is under His guidance and protection, there cannot be than when she seeks no comfort, light, or help from creatures—because, enjoying perfect happiness within, what reason could she have to seek it from without? This indeed was the case with Dame Gertrude, both in life and at the time of her death. Especially is this disposition to be noticed during her last sickness; for there can be no doubt but that she would not only have accepted, but would have sought, spiritual comfort from without, if she had not enjoyed interiorly what sufficed for her happiness—namely, the presence of God, as the Lord and Master of her powers. As she enjoyed this Divine presence, it was not difficult, but rather a pleasure, to

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be without help from without, especially when she saw that it was God's will that she should be deprived of the most gracious pledge of His love in the Sacrament of His most precious Body for her Viaticum—a happiness most good Christians enjoy when they are dying. This happiness, however, was denied Dame Gertrude (though her soul much thirsted for it, so far as might be God's will), because her throat and mouth were so furred and stopped up by her illness that there was great fear lest she should be unable to consume the Sacred Particle. For fear also of infection, it was decided two or three days before her death to isolate her from the rest of the community, save those who were appointed to attend on her. By this she was deprived of the solace of their presence, and especially of the Abbess, whose company would have been most grateful and helpful, had there been need. Dame Gertrude, however, perceiving that this was ordained by the providence of God, willingly accepted the disappointment, not only of being cut off from the comfort of the community, but also of the Abbess, who could have afforded her so much consolation, if God had permitted it. She was, however, the more easily comforted, as she enjoyed within her His presence Who alone could give her perfect contentment, peace, and satisfaction.

In consequence of her interior occupation, peace, and satisfaction, Dame Gertrude did not seek for any comfort from man or woman, except that she made a brief confession on the usual appointed day. Indeed, so much at peace was she that when she was asked if she would like to see her ordinary Confessor, who, it was

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reported, though falsely, had returned from Chapter, she replied that she did not need him, and did not desire his presence, though no one was better acquainted with her interior or more likely to promote its welfare. The same Sister likewise asked Dame Gertrude if she would like to see her former Confessor, with whom she had the difference of which I have spoken, but again the answer was in the negative. But Dame Gertrude, seeing that the Sister was not satisfied, and was disposed to press her to see one or other Confessor, replied more emphatically : "No, I will see no man."

I may also mention that two or three days before this incident, the Abbess had asked Dame Gertrude whether she would like to see her former Confessor in England, or any of the other Fathers who had assembled for Chapter at Douay ; but she replied that she thanked God there was no need for it, but that she humbly begged that they would all pray for her.

No, it is impossible that Dame Gertrude, a soul believing in and desiring eternal happiness, and abhorring the contrary, would not have desired and sought comfort and help by external means, had she not found and enjoyed within herself that comfort which can be obtained only in God. No doubt, too, she saw that if she sought comfort from without, which she did not need, and which she had no leave from her internal Lord and Ruler to seek, she would have hindered and confounded rather than increased her interior happiness. Hence she contented herself with what alone was able to give her true and full contentment—namely, the contemplated presence of God in her soul, with the working of His light and grace therein. This alone,

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then, even if there were no other evidence—which is far from being the case—would suffice to show the happiness of her soul at the time of death, upon which depends the happiness of the future life.

Those who have no such satisfaction within themselves, on the other hand, always seek for it by some means from without. There cannot, therefore, be a greater or surer token of a happy death than that which I have alleged in the case of Dame Gertrude. I except only the certitude which God, by His omnipotent power, can cause by a miracle or other extraordinary and supernatural means. But we should not expect such revelations, nor does God usually impart them.

But may we not justly look upon Dame Gertrude's case as miraculous on account of its great rarity—for how many do we see die thus?—and also on account of the indications of God's handiwork? For is it not a wonderful thing to see a young maiden, full of fear and scrupulous by nature, shaken, terrified by solemn warnings from without by those in authority, and above all dreading and abhorring eternal damnation, not to seek help or comfort from man or woman, especially when she had as large and as good a choice as anyone could wish to have? Indeed, so far from being troubled, she, on the contrary, found herself so possessed by God, and so fully comforted and satisfied in Him, that it would have been a great outrage and injury to the Divine Majesty for her to have sought comfort from creatures. Is not this, I say, a miracle, or at least equivalent to a miracle? What better token, then, can we reasonably demand or expect of a happy and holy death? Lord, how vain it would have been for me to

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have gone to her out of my own head, or for any other, even with leave of Superiors, and to have uttered words of exhortation, or to have encouraged her to resignation, confidence, etc. ! For what more could we have done ? For, in truth, Dame Gertrude was already actually engaged in the exercise of all her duties, in virtue of the light and impulse of the Holy Spirit, Whose efficacy was infinitely above anything that could be wrought by human words or works. To listen to me would have been, for the time, to cease to attend to the internal Speaker ; at least, my words would have been to no purpose (if they did not actually cause disturbance), for the condition of a soul that has a strong, urging propensity, such as Dame Gertrude had, and is pursuing an interior course in which the said propensity is worked upon by grace, is such that God immediately provides what she requires ; or, if He wills her to seek help from without, He directs her to do so. If, then, such a soul looks not for aid from without, it is a sign that her interior Lord has provided for her needs from within, and the soul herself and all others should be satisfied. “ *I adjure you that you stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please.*”¹ But, alas ! who but God and the soul herself can tell that this is her state and happiness ? None but those who are acquainted with her interior dispositions—and they are but few—or those, perhaps, who are pursuing the same interior course. Others can judge only by external appearances, and these alone afford little indication upon which a judgment may be grounded. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at if the latter formed a different opinion

¹ Cant. ii. 7.

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about Dame Gertrude from those who were acquainted with her interior dispositions, or were in the same spiritual course, and consequently were better able to form an opinion about her. "*All the beauty of the king's daughter is within*" (Ps. xlv. 14). What more could you wish to hear of her? She was one of those whom St. Paul describes (Rom. viii. 14) as the children of God—who are wrought in, led, carried, guided, and ruled by the Spirit of God. She was of the number whom our Blessed Saviour Himself terms "*true adorers of God*"; and He seeks for such as will adore Him in spirit and in truth (John iv. 23). But, on the other hand, He heeds not those who, without true internal worship, seem to adore Him by their many words (*multiloquium*), loud speaking, or many and great external deeds. But, alas! who can distinguish the children of God, those true adorers? for their working is principally internal and spiritual, not sensible and visible to the eyes of others. True adorers may perhaps be recognized by those whose internal spiritual senses are exercised in the same manner. These can often distinguish by small external indications the working of the Holy Spirit in other souls, because of the resemblance to His working in their own. Hence those who are not experimentally acquainted with the internal working and illumination of the Holy Spirit easily err in their judgments about a soul that is wholly in the hands and under the guidance of God, like Dame Gertrude.

These observations will be plain to anyone who can lay a claim to a sound judgment in these matters, if he will but consider the writings of Dame Gertrude, and

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what I have already recorded of her life and death. I shall add yet further evidence for the edification of those who are favourably disposed, and for the refutation and enlightenment of those who are inclined to cavil or take offence at everything, that these also may be brought to acknowledge the truth.

If a person during life or at the hour of his death spoke as divinely as St. Peter or St. Paul, or any other spiritual person, yet gave one reason to think that his mind was not illuminated nor his will moved by the Holy Spirit, I should not be much edified by his words, nor should I pronounce him to be a saint, or great in the sight of God. What external act, then, without further knowledge of a person's interior life, can enable us to measure the internal sanctity of another? There is none whatever. But any knowledge we have of the interior life of a person affords us a corresponding knowledge of his holiness: "*For all the glory is within*" (Ps. xlv. 14). When, then, an interior soul approaches the hour of death, and, enjoying the full use of her faculties, is observed to speak only when necessary to make some reasonable reply to a question, and continues in silence for a good space before death, and even until the moment of death, I should have every confidence in the eternal happiness of that soul. And I should believe that during her external silence, she was employed according to the will of God; and what greater happiness can a soul desire?

I think we may draw a similar conclusion from the demeanour and carriage of Dame Gertrude. For instance, among many tokens, we may mention her bearing towards Father Cuthbert Horseley, who anointed her

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and put her various necessary questions, to all of which she answered briefly and clearly, "Yea, with all my heart." I shall presently give this priest's account of his conversation with her, and the conclusion he arrived at from his own observation, and from what he heard from other reliable sources.

I think, however, that there is a difference, which I may mention, between souls that have arrived at a state of perfection and imperfect souls at the time of their death. It often happens that the former will take occasion out of their abundant Divine light to discourse on spiritual things ; but the latter most commonly keep silence, for they are in greater need of attending to themselves and immediately to God, and could not discourse to others without incurring distraction. But perfect souls can discourse without distraction, retaining contemplation even while they are speaking, and, indeed, producing their words out of their contemplation and recollection.

These observations are in harmony with the teaching of our Holy Father, who says in his Rule that it belongs to the master—that is, the perfect soul—to speak by way of teaching, though God may sometimes employ an imperfect soul out of a kind of necessity, for want of perfect souls, who are scarce, especially in these days. But imperfect souls are advised by our Holy Father to speak only when they are spoken to—that is to say, they are not to speak with the purpose of instructing or teaching, but only by way of discreet or necessary recreation, or for brotherly or sisterly conversation. This kind of speech is lawful both for the imperfect and the perfect. Perhaps it is even more allowable to the

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imperfect than to the perfect, for the latter need this kind of relaxation less than the former, and are better able to endure silence and solitude. Such recreation may be allowed to the sick as well as to the healthy, for the former cannot be always actually engaged in internal exercises, but must sometimes take rest, and at such times it is proper that they should refresh themselves by conversation, so that they may be able at other seasonable times to employ themselves interiorly towards God.

In this spirit Dame Gertrude recreated herself, when she thought fit, in conversation with her Sisters. It was on such an occasion that she disclosed to the Lady Abbess various particulars about her interior life, for they were always very intimate with one another. Dame Gertrude, however, was not attempting to teach, but only spoke of such matters for want of something better to talk about. The Lady Abbess has put on record what was said on that occasion, and her narrative will be inserted presently.

Beyond the brief and needful replies to Father Cuthbert already recorded, Dame Gertrude gave no express indication of her state. How otherwise she stood with God or employed her time interiorly can be known to God alone ; but we are not to doubt that a soul of such strong propensity and so much grace was diligently and seriously corresponding with God's invitation, according to the power He gave her and according to His will. Some external tokens of her internal occupation appeared, and could not but appear, as will be seen in the accounts given of her last moments by witnesses.

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To conclude, I cannot do better than quote what I wrote in a commentary on Brother Ricerius de Marchia's treatise, and which I added to Dame Gertrude's "Confessions"; for the note in question justifies a point of much moment in Dame Gertrude's life—namely, her recreations and conversations with others at times when she was not disposed to solitude and recollection. The passage is as follows: "You have heard our author say that vain and secular talk or gossip would cause an impediment between God and the soul, and hinder her progress in the way of perfection. But you must understand these words to mean when the talk is in itself evil, as murmuring, which is specially mentioned by the author; or when the person talks out of mere natural inclination, even though the matter were in itself indifferent, or to gratify his sensible nature, but not when he speaks out of a Divine light or with the Divine approbation."

There is no doubt but that the Holy Spirit will allow, and even commend, His disciples to talk about indifferent things for a just cause, as for recreation, or for the sake of brotherly or sisterly intercourse, or some other prudent motive. Conversation in such a case is not to be esteemed unlawful or idle, nor will it be an obstacle in the way of perfection. The Divine Spirit will allow and commend in time of recollection the practice, and the soul may exercise it outside the hour of recollection. In the same sense are other authors to be understood when they declaim against vain and worldly conversations.

This may be shown by the example of great Saints—

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yea, even Saints that led most retired lives, two of whom come to mind : St. Paul the Hermit and St. Mary of Egypt. Of St. Paul we are told that on one occasion, being visited by St. Anthony, he asked the latter what men in the world were doing, whether new houses were being built in the ancient cities in place of the old ones, how the world was governed, or who was Emperor, etc. St. Mary of Egypt also, when visited by Zosimus, asked how matters went abroad, how it stood with the Emperor, etc. Such questions were not put to gratify curiosity or sensible pleasure, for they cared little how it went with the world in such matters ; but they made these inquiries, I believe, because they did not well know what else to talk about. In spiritual matters they were experts, and, as one may say, Doctors in the Faculty. It would, then, have been to little purpose, and perhaps unseemly, to have talked on spiritual matters, and one to have instructed the other. Hence, as it was fitting that they should converse a little together, they talked of matters that were in themselves at least indifferent, and they rendered the conversation good and meritorious by their intention, which was of the best. In a similar manner, as we read in the same work, "The Lives of the Fathers," the hermit Copres behaved towards Rufinus and his companions, when they visited him upon the report of his remarkable sanctity and miracles, some of which he worked in their presence. "The hermit," says Rufinus, "was at that time about eighty years of age. We having come into his presence, he saluted us with the kiss of peace, according to custom, joined with us

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in prayer, and washed our feet. When he had done this, he inquired about the affairs of the world, or what was happening there. But instead of answering his questions, we besought him that he would rather tell us about his own life and exercises, etc.”

CHAPTER XXVI

DAME GERTRUDE'S LAST SICKNESS AND DEATH

THUS far I have dealt with the three earlier periods of Dame Gertrude's life. Now I will speak of the final period, which begins with her last illness down to the hour of her death.

The fatal disease which terminated Dame Gertrude's life was an attack of smallpox, which she caught in the house where three or four persons had been laid up with the illness, but had recovered from it. She was taken ill on July 29 or 30, but had no idea what was the matter. Moreover, no external sign of the illness was apparent when she came to me at the grate on that day. I was to leave on the following day for Douay to attend the General Chapter, and Dame Gertrude came to the grate to confer with me about the spiritual course pursued by the Sisters, and which was to be dealt with by Chapter. She did not allude to her health, and appeared to have all her wits about her, as at other times. Yet this was the last time (though we knew it not) we were to meet in this life. After we separated, she began to feel more and more indisposed, so that a few days later she was carried to the infirmary, and then the disease declared itself. I

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never held any further communication with her, but departed on the appointed day for Douay.

Now that we have settled Dame Gertrude in the infirmary, let us consider her disposition for a happy death. The disposition consists in the internal state of the soul, though this may disclose itself exteriorly, when the occasion to do so arises.

1. The first sign of Dame Gertrude's good dispositions may be seen in almost the last words she wrote in her "Confessions." "I will sing," said she, "unto Thee mercy and judgment all the days of my life, wishing always that Thy will, which is justice itself, may be wholly and perfectly accomplished in me, Thy sinful servant. Let me live as long as it pleaseth Thee, or die in the very beginning of these my desires to love. Send sickness or health, sudden or lingering death, poverty or abundance, good fame, or that I be by all the world despised. In fine, in all do with me as is most to Thy honour" ("Confessions").

Such words of resignation, and much more to the same effect, Dame Gertrude poured forth to God, and they plainly discover a will perfectly resigned to death, a matter of the greatest difficulty. Before she could add anything to these words, she was suddenly surprised by her sickness, which proved to be her last. Thus God gave her occasion to practise and exercise what had been only in will and resolution. Such is commonly the way Divine Providence deals with souls that He tenderly loves. He first disposes them interiorly, and then He actually sends them the probation for which He had previously prepared them.

A little before her last sickness Dame Gertrude

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wrote some lines which also show her excellent dispositions. I may call them her swan song: they express the longing of her soul for death.

My heart shall only this desire,
That Thou, my Lord, dispose
E'en as Thou pleasest in all things
Till these mine eyes Thou close

By death, which I so much desire,
Because it will procure
Me to enjoy my God and All,
Where I shall be secure

That none from me can take my Lord ;
But for eternity,
I shall enjoy my only Good,
And to Him ever be

United by a knot of love
Which nothing shall untie,
But will remain as permanent
As His Divinity.

O happy hour, when wilt thou come
And set my spirit free,
That I my love and praise my God
For perpetuity,

Contemplating His glorious face,
With all that Him adore,
Singing with them His sweetest praise
For ever and evermore. Amen.

A further indication of Dame Gertrude's disposition and preparation for death is to be found in some petitions she wrote in an introduction to a collection of devotions she put together a short time

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before her death. Her words were as follows:¹ "These collections once more I offer to Thee, my God; and those that in perusing thereof are moved thereby to love and praise Thee, be they, my God, mindful of me in their holy prayers, which are most pleasing to Thee. I also desire them of their charity to read these things to me which hereafter follow when, sick to death, I shall be compassed with those fears and terrors which ordinarily accompany that dreadful hour; at which time, as at all other, be Thou my helper and protector, and in the bowels of Thy mercy, good Father, remember me, poor beggar, and from heaven send me now and at the hour of my departure Thy grace, which may bring me to Thee, where I may, with all the elect, praise, adore, and worship Thee for ever and ever. Amen.

"I beseech you, all Saints, and thee especially, most benign Father, St. Benet, with knees bent and hands heaved up, that together with me ye crave of the Lord that He grant me a happy end.

Maria mater gratiæ,
Mater misericordiæ,
Tu nos ab hoste protege
Et hora mortis suscipe. Amen.

Nihil aliud nisi Teipsum, Domine.
Credo videre bona Domini in terra viventium.

"O infinite Goodness, Who art Charity itself, pour Thy grace abundantly into my poor soul! I invoke Thee, my God, by the merits and intercession of all

¹ The following passages are gleanings from various writings of Dame Gertrude which are at the end of the "Ideot's Devotions," 1658 edition.

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Thy Saints in Heaven and servants on earth, to have mercy on me, both now and at all times, and especially in my last extremity. All I desire is that in life and death I may be disposed of according to the multitude of Thy most abundant mercies, a fountain never drawn dry."

By these preparations it may be gathered that Dame Gertrude had some kind of internal intimation of her approaching end some time before she fell ill or had the least symptom of sickness; or, if there was no direct intimation, she was at least interiorly urged and enabled to prepare for death, as an event that might ere long take place.

As Dame Gertrude was solicitous for the good of her soul, and was endowed with internal impulses towards God both by nature and by grace, we may be sure that all went well between her soul and the Holy Spirit. As He had been careful to guide her and work in her during life, so, now that death drew nigh, in which His Divine work was to be consummated, we are not to doubt but that He perfected it, for otherwise all His labour had been in vain. It is the end that alone crowns the work.

2. As Dame Gertrude's sickness became more serious, and death approached, so did the need for the exercise of resignation increase. To this call she responded by acts of resignation to the pains of her illness, death, purgatory, and the Divine judgments generally, both for time and eternity. In a word, she resigned herself to God in all matters general and particular, according to the suggestions that arose in her mind. The Divine Spirit is wont to suggest various acts of resignation,

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according to what may be most mortifying to our natural will and proportionate to the grace He bestows for it.

As Dame Gertrude increased in resignation, so also did her confidence grow. Nothing is so profitable and secure as confidence grounded on resignation. Nothing but resignation can deserve or cause true and just confidence. When, therefore, we consider the evident tokens of resignation and confidence which are to be found in her writings and in other ways, we may conclude that her resignation and confidence were truly Divine.

3. As Dame Gertrude was most careful in time of health to observe, as all in all, Divine inspirations, so we may judge that in time of sickness, with death approaching, she was, if anything, more careful than ever to attend to them. She enjoyed the full possession of her faculties till the moment of her death, and could not have failed to observe the decay of strength and the oncoming of death; so that ever, from time to time, she exercised herself interiorly towards God, as the following accounts will show, and as we may properly infer from our own knowledge of her spirit and propensity. Hence we may conclude that Dame Gertrude's soul departed from her body in much grace and purity.

Divine inspirations in very interior souls like Dame Gertrude always tend to draw them towards interior quietness and interior actions, and to little that is exterior save in so far as may be necessary. Hence such souls, when they come to die, betray the fewest external tokens of any good souls how it fares with them interiorly. Nor will they talk of their interior or of internal matters without necessity, and this seldom

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arises; but they by preference talk of any honest, indifferent external matter by way of recreation: for in their estimation the interior is so dainty and tender that they will not meddle with it, or disclose it to others, without the leave, light, and will of their internal Guide. Such was the conduct of Dame Gertrude. Not being always able to attend to the spirit, she often during her sickness diverted her mind by conversing about external matters; but as for internal things, she avoided touching upon them without necessity. This was the reason (among others) why she declined to see either of the two Fathers who happened to arrive just then from Douay. This is all the more remarkable because it was reported—though erroneously—that one of them was her own Confessor.

Dame Gertrude made her confession to Father Maurus Pritchard, who had recently arrived from England, and who remained at Cambray on purpose for the confessions, in the absence of the ordinary Confessors. Dame Gertrude was not long at her confession, and, as she afterwards declared, did not go back to her former confessions, but adhered strictly to the advice she had received from her Confessors. I cannot tell whether she had any temptation to return to her former confessions, but certainly upon that point, as on others, she died obedient and full of confidence. Dame Gertrude's conduct in this matter shows clearly that her confidence was in God and in the testimony of a good conscience, and not in men, nor in her own abilities or acts. This is a point on which Dame Gertrude much insists in her writings, and which she considered to be most important for the happiness of

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the soul. This is quite different from the conduct of those who, wanting confidence in God and the testimony of a good conscience, have never done with their interviews with their Confessor, and seem to have no confidence but in his words—a very unstable state and full of fear.

There are various reasons why Dame Gertrude did not wish to see either of the Fathers from Douay. One of the two priests was the Confessor who had ever shown himself most opposed to her spiritual course; the other was, as she supposed, the priest who led her into it, and gave for its pursuit the general instructions which she followed till her death.¹ But to give in detail all the reasons which we may justly suppose she had for refusing to see either priest would be tedious. Besides, some of the chief reasons are spiritual, and not easily expressed or understood; nor, perhaps, are they likely to weigh with souls of another spirit or course; nay, perhaps some might even take scandal, so great is the tenderness, or rather errors and ignorance, of some consciences concerning spiritual matters and conduct. This reason may, however, satisfy all sorts of spirits—namely, that the Council of Trent and the laws regulating enclosure for convents forbid the admittance of persons apart from the community without necessity, whether Confessors or others. In Dame Gertrude's case no necessity could be alleged for either Confessor to see her.

4. We may well suppose that Dame Gertrude followed in her last sickness and at the time of her

¹ These, of course, were respectively Father Hull and Father Baker.

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death those general lights which she enjoyed in health ; for the Divine Spirit neither teaches nor can teach contrary ways or bestow contrary lights, but they are always alike and the same in substance, though there may be a variation in their conditions or circumstances, according to the diverse states and needs of the soul.

In this general light before her illness Dame Gertrude made some observations to me about death on more than one occasion. The following statements give the substance of her remarks :

1. That one should live as one would die, and then to die as one had lived.
2. That the proper way for her and other souls of a kindred spirit to die was in the exercise of patience, silence, interior solitude, resignation, and the lifting up of the mind to God in the manner that God best enabled them to do.
3. Particularly as regards confessions, that one should not yield to the timidity and fears of nature, and make scruples, to the great dejection and obscurity of the soul. Nor, indeed, should one admit anything contrary to the lights enjoyed in time of health, for the Holy Spirit never teaches contrary to Himself. To follow the Divine light, then, is the only secure way, because it tends to make souls suffer and abstain, contrary to the will and inclination of their nature. Thus, in one respect the light may lead souls to mortify their nature, though in other respects there may be no mortification to nature at all, but only pleasure.

Indeed, to souls that follow Divine inspirations and calls, health, sickness, life, and death are all one. They make, as it were, but one spiritual way towards

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heaven, though the subject-matter of the inspirations may be most diversified. One thing only is common to all souls—namely, that in all their doings and sufferings they follow and obey the Divine inspirations and calls.

4. During time of health Dame Gertrude was not anxious as to what should become of her body after death, nor what kind of funeral she should have, nor what remembrance of her would be preserved after death. She resigned herself in all these things to the Divine will, thirsting only after the happiness of the future life, in which she knew true joy is alone to be found, the things of this life being transitory and vain, save in so far as they conduce to future happiness.

It was a singular act of Divine Providence, worthy of note, that both her Confessors—the one who had been opposed to her spiritual course and the other a strong supporter—were absent just at the very time of her brief sickness, and a stranger alone was with her, yet sufficient for her needs. As the adverse Father was inexpedient for her, so the other was unnecessary, and even perhaps undesirable, as may be easily imagined.

I will now let those speak who were with Dame Gertrude during her last illness, and at the time of her death, and who can testify to what they actually saw and heard. The first shall be Father Cuthbert Horsley, a monk of our Order, who was appointed to hear the confessions of the house during the absence of the ordinary Confessors, and was the last man to be with Dame Gertrude, the priest, Father Maurus Pritchard (whom I said had lately come from England, and was

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spending a few days at Cambray), having left for England. In reply to my inquiries, he wrote as follows:

“Reverend Father, I received yours, wherein you request me to let you understand as particularly as I can the disposition I found the religious dame in for a good death. Verily I will, with all my heart. First, if patience, resignation, and confidence in God can give testimony of a good disposition to die well, she died well and happily as ever I saw creature in my life. When I was called in to give her the Last Sacrament, I spoke with her alone, and asked her these questions, viz.: (1) ‘Is there anything that doth trouble your conscience or disquiet your internal peace?’ She answered: ‘No, Father. I thank God, nothing!’ (2) ‘Do you willingly accept of these afflictions, or whatever else it shall please God, His Divine Majesty, to lay upon you for the satisfaction of your sins?’ ‘With all my heart.’ (3) ‘Are you content to die, if it please God to take you in this sickness?’ ‘With all my heart.’ (4) ‘Do you forgive all your religious Sisters and all the world for whatsoever they have offended you in, and do you desire likewise forgiveness of them all?’ ‘Yes, with all my heart.’ (5) ‘Are you confident, and do you believe and hope, that, by the merits of the Passion of our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, your soul shall be saved?’ ‘Yes, Father, I am confident in Almighty God, and do really believe and hope He will.’ (6) ‘Do you desire this Holy Sacrament of Extreme Unction?’ ‘Yes, with all my heart.’ With that I called in the religious, and gave her that Holy Sacrament, and afterwards the Plenary

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Absolution, which we have by participation from Spain, and exercised some other ceremonies, according to the rubrics of the Ritual, and came forth. After this I saw her no more, but still inquired how she did, and answer was given that she remained still in the same quietness till her very last breath. I have given you as particular relation of her disposition to die well as I can. My Lady Abbess can particularize to you much more than I, for she was almost continually with her, both before and after. But certainly she gave signs of as great resignation and confidence in Almighty God as could be seen in anyone, which without all doubt is an evident sign of her being in the favour and grace of His Divine Majesty, Whose holy fruition I doubt not but she enjoys, which of His infinite mercy He grant us also." The letter is dated October 20, 1633.

The second letter is from one of the religious, Dame Ann More (cousin of Dame Gertrude), who was appointed to tend her cousin in her last sickness. The letter was written to one who was a kinswoman both of the writer and of the deceased. The letter afterwards came into my hands, and from it I make the following extract: "It was my good fortune to be with her [Dame Gertrude] for the time of her sickness, and by her when her happy soul departed. I beseech Jesus to grant me grace to imitate her innocent life, that I may have so happy a death. Truly she hath left so great edification to us which are behind her that my poor pen is not able to express. The pains which I took about her in her sickness are not to be compared to the great comfort which I received to see so great patience in a sickness so loath-

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some as hers was. Verily I have seen in her Job upon the dunghill, Lazarus with his sores, an angel in paradise—so resigned was she to the will of God; so willing to die; so ready to suffer more, if it pleased God; so firm a confidence, with humility, in Almighty God; always praying; still calling on the sweet Name of Jesus!”

The third account I shall give is that of Sister Hilda Percy, a lay Sister, one of the four appointed to attend on Dame Gertrude, and who was with her till the end. Sister Hilda wrote as follows: “Her [Dame Gertrude’s] sickness began to appear on July 29, though she had been a fortnight before much indisposed as to meat and sleep. Still, she was able to go up and down the house till August 1, upon which day she found herself so weak that she was not able to rise to hear Mass, and that same day she went to the infirmary. The doctor of physic, coming to her, could not find what her sickness was, nor perceive any fever until the smallpox appeared; but we perceived she suffered much anguish and pain with admirable patience from the first hour until her last breath. Thus she continued, the smallpox being a-coming out for the space of ten or eleven days, with great patience, her danger still increasing. I, lying in the same room with her and being about her, heard her asked whether she desired to speak with Father Baker, or would have anything signified or not to him concerning her. She answered: ‘No, but to give him thanks a thousand times, who had brought her to such a pass that she could confidently go out of this life without speaking to any man.’

“Confession-day being come (which was then upon

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every Saturday), she desired a priest to come to her, and at that time there was none to be had here but a stranger whom we had never known before. He being come in, she humbly went to confession, but could not communicate by reason of an extraordinary stiff phlegm, which took her upon her first coming into the infirmary, and continued till the breath went out of her body.

“The doctor, coming frequently to her, gave her many things, which she took with great patience, except one syrup which seemed very loathsome to her, which she desired for God’s sake to have given her no more; to which I immediately answered her, ‘For God’s sake she must take it, her recovery being of great concern to us.’ Whereupon, without reply, she took it, submitting as often as it was given her, which was every half-hour. She never complained of her pains, but, as we plainly discerned, with all sincerity told us where she suffered, and when she felt better and when worse. Sometimes she called and said: ‘I fry! I fry within! But all is nothing in comparison of what I suffer in my throat.’ In all her sickness she was never troubled at anything that was done or said about her except once. It being observed that she suffered great pain with much patience and resignation, one of us happened to say to her; ‘God be praised, dame, that you leave us so good an example to bear what suffering is laid upon us.’ At which, with a disturbed countenance, she shook her head, and said: ‘Hold your peace!’ But the person replied in her hearing (for at that time she was doing something about her which caused her much pain): ‘Though you are not willing to hear it, yet we ought to take example by it.’ To which she made no reply.

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“She often desired to lie quietly, wholly giving herself to God, praising His Divine Majesty, Whom she experienced never laid upon His servants more than they were able to bear. At other times she desired to be recreated, and this she heartily and freely did to our comforts, signifying how those recreations did her much good, whereby we perceived her peace, both of mind and soul. Upon some occasion which I do not well remember a dear friend of hers said unto her: ‘Though your life be very grateful unto me, yet I do not so much as beg it once of Almighty God.’ Hearing which, she said joyfully: ‘That is the very best of all.’ They both concluded, ‘His Holy will be done in all things.’

“She, finding herself to grow worse, desired to have the Last Sacrament administered to her; but we, not perceiving any present danger, put it off for some four or five days, during which time she never spoke more of it, but left it to God’s providence and our care, we having all things in readiness against the time.

“Upon August 16, in the morning, My Lady sent word that we (the four appointed to help her) might, if we would, come to the choir to communicate before Prime began. One of us went to her and told her that we were going to the choir to communicate, and asked her whether she desired that we should take the Body of our Lord for her Viaticum. To which she replied: ‘Yes, for God’s sake.’ And so we did. When we returned she grew worse, as she had divers changes before. She spent all that day very quietly and piously, stirring little until towards night, and then she desired to be held up a while; but she was

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not able to be long in that posture, but laid herself down, hearkening to many holy aspirations.

"Sometimes I begged she would remember me in her prayers, and she answered me confidently that she would when she got to Heaven; and the like she did when she was several times asked to pray for all this company.

"To conclude: she spent her time very devoutly, with great edification to us all that were present, until towards twelve o'clock at night, when she called for something which she took, and after that lay quietly, yet seeming to draw very near towards death. And, beginning to pray, we frequently pronounced aspirations into her ears, to which she answered as long as she could speak. When she could not utter a word more, she kissed the crucifix and lifted up her hands, and so happily reposed in Our Lord upon August 17, 1633.

"Much more might be said of her sickness and patience, but, for my part, I am not able to speak what she deserves. As touching the nature of her distemper, you have heard of it. I will, however, touch one point, and that is how it was most loathsome and odious, very near the plague; and, indeed, her flesh, both inwardly and outwardly, did rot away, so that we had much ado to keep the flies from making nests in her face and eating it while alive, and she not at all complaining. I asked her whether she felt them, to which she answered: 'Yes.'"

The fourth account is that of the Lady Abbess,¹ her Superior. This is the correspondent I have already

¹ This was Dame Catherine Gascoigne.

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frequently cited. She was very intimate with Dame Gertrude. The Lady Abbess wrote: "This time of her [Dame Gertrude's] last sickness (which was not long, but wonderfully painful and vehement), she hath left us a great example of patience, resignation, and confidence in God, as all do affirm that had anything to do about her, or who were present with her in the time of her sickness. As she had been faithful to God in practising and prosecuting the happy course which Father Baker first put her into, and which she had so often in her lifetime professed to be beneficial to her soul, and most earnestly begged of Almighty God that she might persevere in the practice of it till death, so dare I constantly affirm that she stood faithfully to the principles and practice of it all the time of her last sickness, to the very last moment of her life. For the happy exercise of love and confidence, which, as I say, she had practised with so much diligence and fidelity in her life, God Almighty (as seems plain to me) did give her grace and ability to continue the same till her very expiring. I often went to her in the time of her sickness to afford her what solace I could for the ease of her pains, which were very grievous. But instead of comforting her, I was much comforted myself to see her so patient, so truly resigned to the Divine will for all things without exception, so humbly confident in the goodness and mercy of God; and, in a word, so sweetly and happily disposed for God that I know not how to express it. When she had been some five or six days sick, and her throat growing so ill that she feared it would hinder her speech, she desired to have the Confessor to come in to hear her confession,

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which he did, and gave her a Plenary Indulgence. But her disease was in such a manner that she could not, nor was it thought fit for her to, communicate then, and much less afterwards. Ever after that confession, she seemed to have her soul settled in such peace that she had now no more to do but only to resign herself to God Almighty's disposition, neither fearing to die nor desiring to live, but only to do His Holy will, living or dying.

"I did ask her sometimes when I was to write to Douay, if she would have me to say anything for her to any there, where they were assembled for a General Chapter then being held there, and whether she desired not to speak with Father Baker, or with her ancientest Father (Dom Benet Jones), who was also there, or with any other of our Fathers: for I said I was sure they would any of them come to her. And she answered No, but humbly desired, for God's sake, all their prayers. She said that if anything in the world had troubled her conscience, she could have spoken it to the Father that had heard her confession, as well as to any other; and she seemed to have been very glad of Father Maurus; for he had served her turn as well as any man in the world could do. Some three or four days before she died, when we feared she would not escape, I went to her one night, as I used to do, and I thought fit to let her know she was in danger, and so I told her. Whereat she seemed to be nothing at all moved or daunted one jot, but by words and gestures showed all signs of resignation that could be. I told her how loath I was to part with her, and what a loss I should have. And she, perceiving me to be troubled, answered: 'Oh, do not fear; do not doubt God

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will supply.' I said again : ' If it be His will that you escape, it would be a great comfort to me. But if He will take you to Himself I dare not resist : His Holy will be done.' ' Yea, that is the best of all,' said she, ' His Holy will be done.' Then we fell into speech—I know not how—about Father Baker. ' God reward him,' said she, ' for what he hath done to my soul ! and God reward him for all he hath done to this house ! that he should bring a soul to such a pass that, coming to die, she hath nothing to trouble her, but to rely wholly upon God.' And, speaking something of His great goodness and disposition in all things, and especially His vouchsafement towards herself, ' God,' saith she, ' hath given me peace in my soul ; and what can one desire more coming to die ? His sweet will be done in me and in all things ! Methinks I have nothing at all to do but to leave myself wholly to His disposition, and let Him do what He pleases.' And these were her very words, as near as I can remember ; and more to the same effect did she say, which plainly sheweth how truly resigned she was both for her own particulars and for all things concerning the house, and how confidently she relied upon God Almighty's providence and care of them both. For presently she fell to speaking of things concerning the house. ' It is a great comfort to me,' said she, ' to leave all things at so good a pass. I do not doubt but my ancientest Father will think his journey well bestowed, and will go away well satisfied about us. There are a great many fine souls in the house, and I doubt not but that God will have many a Saint out of it.' And more she said to this effect—how much God Almighty had done for us, and likewise

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how everyone in their kind and manner did seek and endeavour to please Him. And thus she discoursed with me for a good space together, in as perfect senses and memory as ever she had in her life ; so that, although I was almost sick with staying there, yet could I scarce find in my heart to leave her, she spoke so comfortably to me. Before this she did two or three times in her sickness mention to me how careful and tender everyone was of her, and how charitable and loving all were to one another. ‘ Good Lord,’ said she, ‘ where is now the aversion that was said to be so much amongst us ?’ (For the former Father that was so adverse to her had many times told her that she was odious to divers in the house, and that they had great difficulties with her.) ‘ Do these proceedings,’ said she, ‘ show as if there were aversions ?’ Thereto I said I thought it was not possible they could dissemble the matter and make such a show if they did not do it really. And she replied : ‘ No, sure ; it is not possible : they mean too well to do so.’

“ Upon the Assumption of Our Lady the physician wished that, with all speed, the Last Sacraments might be ministered to her. And so Father Cuthbert came in as soon as Evensong was ended, which for that cause was hastened, and she received them with great devotion. And he also gave her then the Absolution, which is usually given at the point of death, for we all thought she was very near it, and the doctor said she could not live past midnight, and wished that as few as could possibly might be about her, the infection did so increase and grow still more contagious the nearer death. And though I meant not to have left her as long as she was

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alive, it was fit that I should forbear in respect to the community. Besides, I was very sick that night, and the doctor said I had been already too bold. So that henceforth I had no more company with her. Only there were four appointed to tend her, and we expected every minute when she would expire. Yet she lived all the next day, and till midnight again, and the most part of that time, as I conceive and gather, she spent in prayer. For the nearer to death the more quiet did she lie, and desired less to speak, save only at times to refresh and recreate her.

“The night before she died came to our hostelry the former Father Confessor, and because there was another with him, word was carried to the infirmary that he and Father Baker were come. And one of the four asked her if she desired not to speak with Father Baker, and she answered, ‘No.’ And they asked her if she would speak with the Father, the former Confessor. And she, speaking a little more loud and earnestly, said: ‘No, with no man.’ Then they asked if she would have God, and she answered, ‘Yea,’ which plainly showed us, as seems to me, how confidently she died, relying wholly upon God, and continually (so far as could be gathered by her) all the time of her sickness raising herself towards Him in such manner as He did enable her, without seeming to have any impediment betwixt her soul and Him, but always by love aspiring to Him.

“She fell sick the very day our Fathers went from hence to Douay, but was indisposed some days before. When she and I parted with Father Baker at the grate, she went to her chamber sick, and the next day was carried to the infirmary, and the 17th day of the

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month of August, 1633, after midnight (the convent being at Matins), about one of the clock, she rendered her happy soul to God, Whom she sighed and thirsted after with so great a love that she esteemed all her sufferings nothing for His sake."

Dame Gertrude died at the age of twenty-seven years, four months, and twenty-three days, having been born on March 25, 1606. She was nearly ten years in Religion, and was almost seven years in the practice of her spiritual course, which she crowned and consummated with a happy death, as the preceding narrative may justly give us cause to hope, and to praise the goodness of God for the same.

Requiescat in pace. Amen.

APPENDIX

WHEN Father Baker had almost completed his life of Dame Gertrude, it occurred to him to ask the help of "a certain person" who was particularly well acquainted with the subject of his sketch. He thereupon wrote to the said person, earnestly exhorting her to set down in writing anything that she could call to mind that was at all worth recording. As Father Baker knew that this person was no scholar, and, indeed, unlearned, though of credit and talent, and was moreover very much occupied, he suggested that she should set down things just as they occurred to her, without being solicitous about the order of time or other circumstances. The said person responded to Father Baker's request, and in due time the account reached Father Baker. The latter attached much importance to the writer's statements on account of the "worth of the person," and also on account of her having better means of knowing the incidents she recorded than he had. He therefore advises the reader to give the preference to this account where it in any way differs from his own. In point of fact, the differences are very slight. We have not been able to obtain the full text of the letter, but the principal portion is here given.

*Infirma mundi elegit Deus,
Ut confundat fortia.*

"She (Dame Gertrude) hath divers times told me that she came to Religion much against her will, and in a manner forced by him whom she had not power to

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resist by reason of the great affection she bore unto him.¹ It seems to me that he did see some tokens or signs in her of God Almighty's grace, and did hope for great good effects to come thereof; and that he did so far presume and build upon her for a foundation, that he would not be denied by her, when as yet she herself was so unwilling and far from it. And though she seemed, at least after he had long and much solicited her, to be willing, when she saw there was no remedy, yet she grieved inwardly, and retiring and withdrawing herself in solitariness, would sit weeping and lamenting for it. And this grieving was not that she desired to take any worldly course (for she would say that her nature was not delighted nor did take comfort in anything of the world), but it was because a solitary life (as she esteemed the lives of religious to be) was wonderful contrary to her disposition, and therefore she had a great apprehension of it. And when her friends and those of the house did observe an alteration in her, as that she did grow more retired and solitary, they esteemed it to be mere devotion and nothing else, and that she had been praying, when in reality she was grieving privately to herself.

"I have said to her sometimes, that I marvel that her father could not perceive and discover in her that she had no mind nor desire to such a course. And she said he did not, but thought she had been willing and desirous. And when she saw that her ghostly Father (Dom Benet Jones) made full account of her, and was resolved upon it, she would not disgrace nor disgust him so much (and indeed, she said he had won her heart so much, and she was so affected towards him that she could deny him nothing), but that at least she would be willing to make trial of a religious life, and that was all she would promise him, and he desired no more.

"In this manner she came and received the Habit,

¹ Her spiritual father, Father Benet Jones.

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with no desire or intention at all to profess. And I would say to her I wondered she would take it upon such terms. Did she not esteem it a disgrace to leave it? She said, No, not any disgrace at all. She had no apprehension of that, for when she had made trial, she had done the uttermost she could. Her natural father did write to her in the time of her noviceship, and told her that if she should not have her health (which God forbid, said he) he would not love her one whit the less, but far the more, for her so heroical resolutions. And though he would not go about to dissuade her from any course which our Saviour might call her to, yet if by any means it were discerned that this was not the course wherein she could best serve Him to His honour and glory, she could presume of him at any time, for he would never deprive her of his care over her, but would be ready to concur further with her what he could. And to this effect did her father write to her.

“But I know not how she passed through most part of her noviceship. I think with small comfort or satisfaction to herself, though to others all seemed to go well and current with her, and great hope there was of her proceeding. Towards the time of her profession she wrote to her father that now, by the grace of God, she had made her resolution to proceed. Yet when the time of profession drew near, I am sure she was wonderfully irresolute and much troubled about it—insomuch that when Father President came, and was here for a week or fifteen days before our profession, she was often in that time going to tell him that she would not profess. But she was always hindered from doing so and put off upon some occasion or other (as it should seem God would have it); so that she could not possibly get to speak with him at those times when she was so troubled; for if she had spoke with him (as she told me) she would have said that to him that he could not have accepted or admitted her to profession. But it seemed God

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Almighty intended and provided otherwise; so that either she did not speak to him, or else when she was with him she had not the heart to open her griefs. And the very day before her profession especially she was most troubled, and watched to get to him in the evening, but could not by any means, until she was called (being late that night) before the Council for examination, where she was accepted and admitted to profession, as were all the rest of her company. That same night, I remember, I was sent into her cell upon an occasion, and then she told me that now she was resolved to stay in the house and profess; whereat I smiled, and said I hoped she never meant otherwise, for I thought then that she had but jested with me, and did not know of her interior trouble and grief, and how full and heavy her heart was at that time, as she has since sometimes told me.

“ But after her profession was made, then did she live in greater misery than ever before, discontented in mind and wonderfully unsatisfied, sorry for having taken the course upon her, grieved at all those who had furthered her in any way, or been an occasion of bringing her into such slavery and servitude as she esteemed her life to be, which seemed most bitter and tedious to her. Especially she was most of all offended with her ghostly Father of England for having brought her to so great misery that she was scarce able to endure to hear his name without vexing and chafing in her mind against him. Indeed, at one time, when others did speak of him, saying, what a friend and father he was to the house, and how much we were obliged to him, and especially how great a friend of hers he was (as she hath told me since), that she was not able to hear it with patience; but, fretting in mind, did say to herself, Yea, marry, he had served her turn indeed! In truth she was half inclined to repent that ever she had had anything to do with him, for having thus requited her so great love and affection to him with misery which

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she could see no end of ; and suchlike conceits as these she had often of him. Thus did she live in much affliction and discomfort, which did daily increase on her finding herself less and less able to comply with her obligations, having withal but a weak and infirm body, which added to her interior grief. And she wondered how others could take any comfort or satisfaction in their state, or hear it prized and commended. Whereas she, for her part, could find no such thing, but quite the contrary ; and yet she laboured by all the means she could to do her best, and sought out all our Fathers that she hoped to get any comfort or advice from, and even tired out her Superiors, who took much pains with her ; and her Mistress spent much time and many hours with her to take away and lessen the tediousness of her affliction. And she herself did read much and turn over all the books she could get or hope to find any help or comfort in ; and still she was never the nearer, but rather found herself further from God, and from the amendment of her imperfections. Nay, she hath told me that she did find her nature to grow much worse and more perverse in every respect, and especially she did behave herself more untowardly to her Superior within, whom she had so great difficulty with, that she could not afford her a good countenance, much less could she obey her or endure her proceedings in anything. Yea, even to her Mistress, whom she then much affected, she was sometimes so perverse that when her Mistress did see her so altered to the worse, she would say : ‘ Here is Dame Gertrude, but I would to God Sister Helen were here again.’ And thus she increased in her imperfections, and her heart rather hardened than otherwise inclining to goodness ; and seeing herself to live in this manner, it much perplexed and troubled her conscience, for she desired to please God, but could not find the means for it, nor any remedy for her distressed soul.

“ I think she had always difficulty about confession,

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for she did not make any general confession either at clothing or profession, as others did. And so she hoped that perhaps by a general confession she might be something quieted, and begin to do better, and thereupon she made a general confession. And after she had made the same, she was far more unsatisfied, and much more tormented in conscience than before; so that now she thought all hopes and means for remedy were quite shut up from her, and that she might bid farewell to all comfort, and set her heart at rest for ever, for she would never see merry or comfortable days in Religion; she hoped only that she could not live long, being but weak of body. And indeed, as she hath told me, if this misery of hers had lasted but a while longer, it had surely shortened her days, and brought her by this deep melancholy into a consumption or some other disease or infirmity that would quickly have made an end of her.

“ But at length, when Almighty God did see His time, He was pleased to open the door of His mercy to her afflicted soul, and turn her most bitter grief into the most sweet tears of love, her mourning into joy and comfort. He would no longer permit her to lose her time. She sought Him and desired Him, and it was not in vain, for He so provided that at last she met with one who put her into the direct and secure way of abnegation and resignation. She spent many hours in the nights sighing and groaning to Almighty God to help her, and moaning her lamentable case. And being sometimes in such a pitiful plight that her Mistress did not know what to do with her, she was advised by her to go to Father Baker and try, for perhaps he might be able to do her some good, because some others did like him well, and had found benefit by him. But she had very little mind to go to him, for she had before rather a great aversion from him, and slighted him; at least, I am sure she had but a very poor opinion of him, and was one that, amongst others, had

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laboured to have him removed from the house the Chapter before. (This Chapter was held in the July next after her profession, and next precedent to her prosperous consultation with Father Baker, which was about the All-Hallowtide next following after the said Chapter.) Yet at least, for the ease of her affliction, she was willing to make trial, necessity and her misery urging her to it. For she had before sought help and remedy from all those that were most like to have done her good, and even, as I have said before, tired them out with importunities without finding remedy, except only for the present she was well sometimes, but it lasted not; for upon the next occasion she was in as ill case as before. And so thereupon she went to Father Baker, and after she had been some few (not above two or three) times with him she needed no more persuasion or urging to it; for presently she began to find comfort and ease in her mind, which did invite her to go more frequently. And when he had given her some instructions, and put her into a course of prayer, and told her that that must be her way, she did presently see that it was so indeed, and that prayer must be her way, and did find by little and little that by means of prayer her difficulties did decay, and grace did succeed, and grow more and more every day. And when once she was shown the way and manner of prayer, it proved both plain and easy to her, and very suitable to her spirit (as plainly and evidently appeared afterwards by the happy progress which she made in it). And she hath told me since that it was no hard matter to persuade her that to tend towards God by love (by exercising her will and affections towards Him) must be her only way, for her soul did wonderfully relish that exercise of love. Indeed, she found so much benefit by it that within a short space it wrought a marvellous great alteration in her, settling her mind in peace and quieting her conscience, which before was so tormented that it was even almost torn in pieces.

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And she who before was not able to abide in the house, but needs must be gone for the great difficulty she had with her Superior (as I remember, she told me she had made suit for it to our chief Superior), would now rather choose to stay and have the poorest corner in the house than go to any other house in the world, and to have all the commodities that were possible to be had. And this notable alteration was not only in her interior, but also plainly appeared in her exterior carriage and behaviour towards her Superiors, inso-much that it was taken notice of by some in the house, who did well observe it, and were not a little glad.

“And whereas before she had written to Father President divers letters of complaint of her Superior and other difficulties, she now turned the leaf, and wrote to him letters of recantation, and retracted all her former complaints and misbehaviour of hers towards her Superior, or otherwise, either by words or writings, and humbly besought him to pardon what was past; for she was now resolved to follow another course and mend her manners. And a great deal to this effect did she write to Father President, whereat he wondered and was much amazed, rejoicing and blessing God for such a change. For, indeed, he had been exceedingly troubled with her about her difficulties, and grieved to see her so afflicted. And now it was no small comfort to him that she was become so quiet, peaceable, and content in mind. And she could never be quiet and satisfied till she had obtained of Father President leave to reiterate her vows again privately in his presence, and with all her heart did now dedicate herself wholly to the love and service of God for ever, and again and again did reiterate the same in her heart to His Divine Majesty. And thus she proceeded, with daily increase in the happy course undertaken with joy to herself and comfort to her Sisters. And with diligence and industry, God Almighty concurring with His grace, she profited in such

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sort that she far overtook all her companions, which had begun the same course, some of them, long before her, and she was now become the ringleader of the rest, and so strong and courageous that by her example and words she was able to animate the weak and faint-hearted.

“ And the greatest and only impediment she had to hinder her in her way was fear and scrupulosity, which did very much abound in her nature. For all other defects and imperfections she was subject unto, they did little by little decrease and decay; and by means of prayer (which did enlighten her to see what she was to do and what to forbear) she became mortified as to her affection to any of those things which might cause hindrance or impediment to her in her way of tending towards God. But this fear and scrupulosity she always had to fight against, and had almost continual combat with it; and for it she had no other remedy but prayer, which did comfort and strengthen her against it. Passing over and transcending such fear, by degrees she became more confident every day, and gained very much in time over her fearful nature. And now, when she came to lead so quiet and contented a life, with much interior peace and satisfaction to her soul and conscience, she was for the most part merry and pleasant in her conversation, and being of a free disposition, by her external behaviour one would never have thought or imagined that she was anything at all inclined to fear or scrupulosity, but rather the contrary—that she was large enough in conscience. For she could take all manner of freedom and necessary relaxations for the bearing up of her weak and infirm body (in so far as was lawfully granted her by Superiors with advice of physicians) as it seemed without any fear; while others (in their case) could hardly be persuaded unto the same amount with the warrant and security withal of their ghostly Father; so that one would never have taken her to be fearful that did not

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know her very well. And, indeed, her fear was not about those or any such things—I mean of not saying her Office, or not observing ecclesiastical fasts or the like—though she never took nor sought dispensations in these things without advice of the physician, who was often consulted about it the time that she forbore saying her Office and kept not the fasts ecclesiastical. This she continued for the space of some three or four years together, taking sometimes more, at other times less, liberty and largeness in it, according as necessity and her infirmity required. Her Confessor always resolutely determined that she might act thus with a very good conscience. Neither was she troubled with anything that happened or that had been done since she came to religion and got into a spiritual course; for having had instructions, and withal having discretion how to make right and true use of them, she never did anything which the integrity of her conscience and sincerity of intention did not excuse before Almighty God (howsoever it seemed otherwise to others), so that she could easily pass over the defects and imperfections therein committed. This practice always turned to her greater good, being cause of much humiliation and resignation to her, while her faults were not any impediment in her way of tendence to God. But all her fears were about some thing or things of her life past before she came to religion, about which she could never satisfy her conscience by any confessions that ever she had made, general or particular; nor by all the help and advice that ever she had from any Confessor or Director, although they had done as much as was possible to warrant and secure her in conscience, that she should no more trouble herself therewith. Yet when they had done all they could, or was possible to be done, she was in as ill case (if not worse) as before. And these fears she had sometimes by fits as long as she lived, upon occasions coming upon her; and she never could find any remedy for the same until she was put into

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a course of prayer by Father Baker. This course being an exercise of love and resignation, did bring her out of such fear by little and little, and she did plainly see that there was no other way in the world would or could have done it, or helped her in it. 'For,' said she, 'if I had not been put into a course between God and my soul that would breed and cause confidence in me towards Him, it had not been all the men in the world that could have secured my confidence or given me peace. I should have been the most miserable, deserted creature that lives, for no man is able to do it, but God; and if I could not have recourse to Him, what would become of me?' And therefore it is no marvel if she did or would have used all the lawful means possible that might or could help her to stand to or bear her up in those instructions which she found by experience to be so beneficial to her soul. And she did often say that those who knew what she had suffered and endured before she went to Father Baker and followed his advice, could not wonder that she should be so wary as she was, to keep herself from having to do more than she must needs with any that she thought might bring her to the foresaid pitiful case, which her fearful nature of itself did so much incline and draw her into, had she not used much industry and violence against the same.

"She had found by experience that her conscience never was nor could be satisfied (about those matters which formerly had troubled her, and which she still feared) by any confession that ever she had made, or by any comfort or help that she had from any man, until that by the means of prayer her conscience was pacified and settled in great peace and tranquillity. And now all her fears and scruples were about those former matters, which yet she had been warranted and assured by more than one Confessor, that she should never trouble herself nor meddle more with them. And so long as she did and could stand to such advice, all

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was well with her; but she did plainly see and find that nothing was possibly able to make her stand and hold her to it but only prayer, by means whereof she received grace and strength for it. And by this may be gathered what reason she had to be chary of herself and wary how she exposed herself to the danger of anyone unsettling her in her prayer, which she found so beneficial to her soul. And she did often say that she verily thought, if she put herself to such abstraction, and used such violence as is commonly urged by some, it would even break her brains, rather than otherwise, considering her indisposition. She did often say that her life in religion would have been most miserable and so grievous to her that she did verily think she would have been content—yea, have desired with all her heart—to have changed her state even with the meanest condition in the world, if she had not happily met with Father Baker, who did teach her to pass over and transcend all fears and tend towards God by love. For nothing in the world could have given her soul peace and satisfaction if she had not been put into such a course between God and her soul, that she might have continual recourse and relation to Him, for that alone is the soul's happiness in this life. And she had great aptness and capacity in her for such a course, having a very good natural judgment and a strong will and inclination towards God, so that she did quickly apprehend the course and experience the happiness and benefit of it. And she found no impediment in the way and practice of it, but only fear, which she was very subject unto, and which did very much abound in her nature; and no other course in the world could ever have drawn her out of this natural fear but only the way of love, which causeth and increaseth confidence, and by little and little expels fear. And she would say that if her director had not referred her so wholly to God (as he did), that she might take her security from Him and not from any man, his direction and advices would never have taken any root

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or produced good effect in her ; for there was no other way that would have prospered with her but that of leaving her to observe and follow the Divine calls and tracts, which seemed to be very plain and clear to her and easy to practise, for God requires nothing but in such manner and measure as He gives grace and ability to the soul to effect it.

“God Almighty had chosen her for a foundress and leader of this little flock gathered together in His name and for His service. By her temporal means we had our beginnings, but much more was she enriched with gifts and spiritual graces, sufficient not only for herself, but also to help and bear up the community in great part in all belonging to our state and profession—I mean, for managing the temporal affairs of it, and in promoting of the spirituality of it with as great zeal as can be imagined. Hitherto she hath been the chiefest pillar and upholder of the house. No mother could be more dear and tender of her only child than she was of the whole community, to seek and promote the peace and quiet thereof, labouring and endeavouring as much as she could possibly to procure and set forward what she esteemed to be most for the good of it and God Almighty’s honour, without regarding or making any account at all of what others said or thought of her doings, or how they censured her for it. And therefore she was thought by some to be too forward, and to take upon herself more than was fitting or befitting her. But God, I doubt not, did otherwise accept of her doings, and she was willing to undergo much more for His sake. She aimed at nothing but His will and honour, which she only regarded in all things. And how free she was from all self-respects or ends He did best know Who was to be her Judge, and that was her comfort, as she would often say : ‘O my God, how different are Thy ways and judgments from those of men!’—*Homo videt in facie, Deus autem in corde*. She did never desist from doing or forbearing

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to procure what she thought was most for the good of the community. Let others say or think of her for it what they pleased, she would follow on and prosecute the matter according to that which in her conscience she did think to be most according to God's will; yet always it was with so much interior quietness and resignation thereunto that if it should happen otherwise, or have a contrary success, she accepted of all things equally as from the hand of God: for she was confident that He would not permit anything to happen amiss to those that desired nothing but according to His will, but would turn all to His honour and their greater good. She was, indeed, for her years of birth one of the youngest in the house, but for her discretion and other virtues of the maturest and eldest. And though she was very zealous, yet was she withal as careful as she could not to proceed in such manner as might justly give occasion of offence. Notwithstanding, it often happened (God Almighty permitting so, to her greater humiliation and merit) that her doings and proceedings were by some others misunderstood and misinterpreted, and her words taken in a quite contrary sense to her meaning and intention.

"It seemed that the time was present to us which St. Teresa spoke of, where she says that God's service is now upon such weak terms that we had need to uphold and defend one another. And, indeed, if God had not helped us wonderfully, and we ourselves likewise endeavoured to help and strengthen one another, I know not what would have become of us, or how we should have been able to strive and struggle against the violence of the stream without being carried away by it. Yet blessed be God for it, Who did not forsake us, nor abandon the care of us His little poor flock, nor would drive it (for the little tender lambs' sake) farther in one day than they were able to go, but always provided measures to keep us from fainting, though sometimes we seemed to be very near it, and brought into very

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narrow straits. And, indeed, it cannot be imagined how great a comfort and encouragement she was to us all in these times of our difficulties; for her example and words were so moving and so efficacious, and proceeded from a heart so inflamed with the Divine love and zealous of God Almighty's honour, that if a soul were even so much dejected as that she was ready to fall or faint, they were of force to raise her up again and move her to confidence and courage. She had such a feeling and compassion of souls when she did see them in peril and danger of being drawn into fear or dejection of mind that she made little account of all she suffered, so that they might be animated and comforted by it. She had tasted by experience in herself how great a misery and slavery or servitude it was for a soul that was apt and capable of the secret internal ways of Divine love to be kept under by fear, and hindered from that which was so proper, and even natural, to the soul, and the soul's happiness in it. And thereupon she would often say: 'What great reason have we to be wary and careful, and look well about us, that through our own fault we permit not our souls to be darkened and obscured under what pretence soever.' For when God Almighty hath done so much for a soul as plainly and clearly to show her the way that He will lead her and what He will have her to do, how great an ingratitude were it for her to neglect what He requires and exacts (which is to adhere unto Him faithfully and confidently); surely she cannot choose but fear (and that most justly) His indignation. For it is not a pretended obedience, nor the applause and warrant of any man, nor of all the men in the world, that will serve to excuse us in conscience before God, when He Himself doth so plainly and manifestly show us His will; and that it was nothing to undergo the hard opinion and censures of men, nor all the difficulties that they were able by any means to procure, provided that a soul might enjoy the Divine light and conduct of His heavenly grace.

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In comparison of this all grievances, afflictions, and miseries are easy and tolerable: for nothing is misery to a soul but to be deprived thereof. She would very often, especially of late, speak much to this effect, and deliver her mind so clearly, and withal she was so moving, that one might well judge she spoke by what she experienced in herself, and out of a Divine light supernaturally infused in prayer, rather than natural. She had a special gift of God Almighty to direct and animate souls in their way towards God, as also to inflame their wills to aspire and seek after Him, as divers in the house do affirm—some of those that were under her care and government, and likewise divers others, who do all acknowledge themselves to have received much comfort from her. And especially when they were sad or dejected in mind, she would be sure to procure them (by some means or other) ease and comfort in their affliction, with so great compassion and charity as could not proceed but from a heart thirsting after the Divine love. For she was not able to endure to see souls kept back or hindered from prosecuting the way of tendence towards God by love, but that she would herself undergo any difficulty to remove the impediment, and would interpose herself to receive the blows in safeguard and defence of those that were weak and not able to bear them without prejudice to their spirits. ‘Oh,’ would she say, ‘methinks God Almighty’s goodness and providence towards us hath been so great and even beyond all expectation in providing this benefit and happiness for our souls’ (she meant of the course taught us by Father Baker) ‘that all we can suffer for it is nothing in comparison of the benefit which thereby we have received. And all things hitherto have, by God’s permission, been so wonderfully disposed of for our good, and everything hath happened so luckily and fell out in good time, that God forbid we should be so fainthearted and ungrateful as not to be willing to undergo any difficulty

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whatsoever rather than permit ourselves to be drawn from it. God bless and deliver us from those ways and directions that will make a soul afraid to have recourse to God, that would darken and obscure our reason so far that we should not be able to discern and observe His inward speaking to our souls, nor dare to turn ourselves towards Him, or to pray in any other manner but how and when we are warranted by men, and take all things at the second hand from them.' What a poor case were that for a soul!

"She would say sometimes that if she had been so tied to any man that she must have observed his dictamen in everything, and that she had held herself to the observation of such and such things as he had experienced either in himself or others, or what he thought good and proper for her, such a course would never have prospered with her; for no instructions in the world would ever have served her turn (as she said) but those which left her to herself to follow the interior guidance of God and to observe what He enabled her unto. For that soul that is capable of internal ways, and hath an aptness to it, and discretion to discern and practise the same, cannot prosper by any other means but by being wholly referred to God, Who only is able to direct the interior of every soul what she is to do from time to time. That which is good for one is not so for another, and that which is beneficial for a soul at some times is improper for her at other times. How then can she be tied or obliged to any directions precisely, unless they teach her to observe and follow the interior guidance of the Divine Spirit? And after this manner would she discourse for a good while together with so great fervour that one might well judge and easily gather by her speeches that she was indeed guided and directed in her interior by the Spirit of God. For always when she spoke of these matters, and especially of late, within these two last years, methought her words were spoken as it were out of a Divine light, and she seemed to have

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an addition at some times to her natural reason of some supernatural light, by which she was enabled to see farther than naturally she could, and this seemed plain to me, and especially more of late. When I did speak to her, she would answer so clearly, so readily, and so effectually to the purpose, that I was always fully satisfied with her words, though the matter were doubtful before. She did speak so feelingly and so resolutely that divers fearful souls were much comforted and animated thereby. As God Almighty did answer and clear her in her interior, when she recurred unto Him in doubtful cases and difficulties of her own, so He did enable her likewise to help others that were afflicted and in need. That saying of Tauler seemed to be verified in her where he sayeth that it is as easy for one that hath an aptness for an internal life, and will be diligent and observant in it, to note, observe, and discern the Divine call within him as it is for one to discern his right hand from his left. This, I say without doubt, she did experience in herself, for she told me lately before she fell sick (we being in private discourse together) that when she was sometimes so afflicted in mind and pressed with fears and scruples that she was almost even overwhelmed therewith, not knowing which way to turn herself—she having recourse to God in such cases—He did so plainly discover unto her what she was to do, and how she should behave herself in the matter, that she could not make any further doubt or question about it, but remained so fully satisfied, so quiet and secured in conscience, that all the men in the world could never have so satisfied and secured her. And often she did say, that the security which a soul hath from God is far different from that which man is able to give, and it works and leaves far different effects in the soul, as plainly appears by her words and behaviour that she had often experienced in herself. And hereupon it was that she did say, as I have before noted, that she could

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not but fear, and that most justly, God Almighty's indignation, if she should permit herself to be drawn, against her conscience, from that course which she did so plainly see and find to be the only way for her to please God in, and comply with her obligation. It was not any pretence whatsoever that would serve to excuse her in conscience before God, nor any man's warrant or security, if she did not follow the Divine tracts and inspirations. No ignorance in Superiors will excuse one from doing this, nor no power of Superior can dispense one, because God Almighty doth exact it by the nature of our religious vows and profession. And He having, out of His wonderful goodness and mercy, called a soul to an internal life, and given her the grace and enablement for it, if she out of folly or vain fear, or under pretence of obedience or of greater perfection, should as it were contradict the Divine will, which was so evidently and manifestly discovered unto her (and as yet the way and course had not been disallowed or disapproved by Superiors), what could she expect but that God Almighty for her ingratitude would withdraw His light and grace from her soul, and leave her to her nature? And so she would return again into that miserable and lamentable case out of which He had mercifully drawn her with a strong hand.

“Some would seem to make an internal spiritual case so full of danger and peril, so hard and almost impossible to continue in without so many circumstances and I know not what, to involve and encumber a soul, that it would deter and fright anyone from ever attempting such a thing; whereas in very deed a true internal spiritual course is plain and easy, simple, and most secure for a soul that hath an aptness by nature and grace, and is called by God thereunto. Surely there is a way for us to come to perfection and to walk in the paths of it now in these days, as well as in former times, when cloisters were full of saints and holy souls. And we have the same obligation to labour

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for perfection as they had ; and God is no less willing to help us now, nor less powerful, than He was in those times. Why, then, should we fear and not follow His most sweet invitation ? not answer His knocking at the door of our hearts ? Is He peradventure grown more terrible or more hard to please ? No, surely. What hath he abated of His wonted mercy, liberality, and goodness to that soul which with all her heart, in simplicity and sincerity, seeketh Him ? St. Bernard saith that if we will not seek our Lord in vain, we must seek Him with perseverance ; let us not, then, seek any other thing instead of Him, nor any other thing with Him ; neither let us leave Him for any other thing ; and then heaven and earth shall sooner fall than that he shall miss Him that so seeketh Him, or he not receive that so asketh, or he not have the gates opened unto him that doth so knock and call. And shall a soul, notwithstanding all this, fear to begin and pursue so worthy and noble an enterprise, being inwardly drawn and moved thereunto by God Himself, and having manifoldly proved the infiniteness of His fatherly goodness, care, and providence towards her, from which proceedeth so wonderful a security and confidence in His providence, that God will not suffer her to err or be misled, though He may permit a soul to err in some sort for her humiliation and greater good, but not to her prejudice. Doth not He say by His holy prophet ?—‘ *Et erit semita et via, et via sancta vocabitur. Et hæc erit vobis directa via, ita ut stulti non errent per eam* ’ (‘ The way indeed is dark and obscure and very hard to be understood by those that are not in the practice of it, but walk by other ways more sensible, and such as must have reasons for all things, or else they can do nothing ’). But for those that are carried towards God more by love and affection than by reasons, more by the will than by the understanding, and are in the practice of it—to them it is both plain, easy, and secure, and so clear that the soul that diligently and faithfully doth pursue it, with the concurrence of the Divine grace, is able to

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proceed therein, notwithstanding all opposition and difficulties that may encounter her in the way. This was very plainly and evidently seen by her of whom we speak, especially in her last two years, during which time she hath suffered and undergone very much for the maintaining of her spirit in this affective way, as I can witness and dare affirm, and much more, which only was known to God, as one might gather and conjecture by her words many times—all which she passed through withal with most wonderful patience, cheerfulness and alacrity of mind, insomuch that it was even admirable to see her behaviour, constancy, and stability in this stormy and tempestuous season, which hath left a great impression in the minds of those who did know how the case stood.

“She did endeavour with great zeal and labour, all she could, to strengthen and advance the happy course which through God Almighty’s great goodness (to His honour, as I hope) is begun in the house, and she would say that all she had suffered, which was not a little, as I can witness, nor anything that she could suffer for the maintaining of it, should hinder her from acquainting souls with what she knew or could imagine, that might in any way animate or encourage them to proceed in the prosecution of it. For she saw plainly that without it there could be no true, solid peace in the community—I mean, not long-lasting or continuing ; for, alas ! if souls be not put into a true course between God and themselves, whereby they may be in some sort or degree satisfied in their souls (or at least some in a community be satisfied, who by their patience and virtuous demeanour may be able, as it were, to bear their own and others’ burdens), how can they choose but lead their lives in misery and dejection, wearisome to themselves and without profit ? And, therefore, how much were we bound to God, Who had provided such instructions for us ? *Non fecit taliter omni natione.* We have great reason to take heed that we prove not ungrateful, but with humility remember His great goodness and

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mercy, and acknowledge it by our faithful perseverance therein. These instructions bring the soul in time and degree to such a dependency on God that if she be in the true practice of them, she will be able to hold on her way, notwithstanding all opposition, contradiction, or difficulty, that she may happen to meet with. Surely there is a way for the soul to walk securely towards God even in the midst of all contrarieties, variations, and differences of opinions, and customs held nowadays in spiritual matters, for God is still the same, without change or alteration. And certainly a true internal spiritual life hath such a foundation and dependence on Him that it is as easy to see in His light (if they walk humbly and simply before Him) what is best in all cases (asking advice where it is best to be had, and only when God requires we should so do) as it is to distinguish the sun from the moon. But men are so different in their opinions; for in indifferent matters one man hath one opinion and another hath another, and ordinarily to ask many men's judgments in anything is to have such a confusion of opinions that it is hard to judge which is best, all, indeed, perhaps, being good, according to their meaning. But we, alas! often judge of man's opinion rather according to our affection than according to the just will of Almighty God and true reason, from which error nothing will so free us as regarding God in all things with a pure intention. These were her words. And again would she say that if Father Baker's instructions had not referred the soul to God, if they had such dependence on himself, that in his absence by death or removal, they could not securely and confidently be prosecuted to the end of our life, we were very simple to prefer them so much before the instructions of others; and for the maintaining of these to withstand those who have power therefore to procure so much inconvenience and difficulties.

"Many times when she spake to me, methought it did very evidently appear to me (and I think that others also would easily have judged the same) that she spoke

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more out of a Divine light than a natural, her words were so moving, so efficacious, so sound, and so to good purpose; and she seemed so clearly to see and discern what she was to do and how to proceed upon all occasions, and was so warranted from within for her doings and proceedings, and with that security in conscience that surely no man nor any creature was able to have given her that assurance which her soul received from God, as by her words might easily be gathered. For oftentimes would she say that the assurance and security which the soul receiveth immediately from God Himself—oh, how far different is it from that which man is able to give! For man cannot make a fearful, weak soul to go to God with confidence, nor is she able to do anything longer than he is present with her to warrant her; but upon the next occasion she is as far from it as before. Oh, how happy, therefore, are those souls that have recourse to God, Whose security all the world is not able to remove or take from them, when He pleaseth to give it! And as Blossius saith of a soul that experienceth the Divine union within herself, that if all the wise men in the world should think the party to be deceived, doubtless the soul would answer: ‘Nay, rather they were all deceived.’ And even so she, when some doubted of her spirit, and determined that she was in a wrong course, not only improper for her, but even perilous for her soul, and that her case was made to be most lamentable and miserable, and they told her that when she came to die, she would find it so; yet, notwithstanding, was her soul so well satisfied in God that she was able to proceed in her way towards Him, transcending all difficulties without staggering, having in her heart a firm assurance and testimony of the truth and verity of her way. Her confidence being founded upon an infallible foundation, no creature was able to bereave her of it so long as she walked in the Divine light, which was the life and food of her soul, and which did thus enable her and bear her up; and could anyone but God have

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done this? Thereupon she would often say: 'Unless they could take God from us, nothing can do us harm.' And, indeed, she feared nothing, but only lest, through frailty or folly, she might be deprived of the internal light, without which the soul is both blind and lame, and able to do nothing at all. And this she had great cause to fear, because the root of it was in her nature, and she was apt upon occasions to fall into such scrupulosity and fear as would quickly obscure and darken her soul. I once said to her—and it was but lately now before she fell sick—that one would think she needed not to be so afraid of anything, for it could not be perceived in her, nor could anyone judge by her proceedings and behaviour, that she was any whit inclined to scrupulosity or fear, or would easily be dejected in mind; and, as I remember, she told me that for the most part it was true. Indeed, she was very clear and was able to pass over and transcend all those things which she most feared, and which had heretofore perplexed her. And she did plainly see that all her fear was nothing, and by her tending towards God, and having continual recourse to Him, even in many cases which seemed very doubtful to her, she was fully resolved and cleared, and so well satisfied in conscience, that it had not been possible for any creature in the world to have given her such security and peace in soul. And yet, notwithstanding, she said, she was so apt and inclined in her nature to fear.

“As long as she walked in the Divine light, all things (though never so grievous and bitter to nature) were not only tolerable, but even easy to pass through, without causing any impediment to her soul; nay, rather they did much advance and help her forwards in her tendence towards God.”

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THE END





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